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July/August 2008 \$5.00

# Illinois Issues

*A publication of the University of Illinois at Springfield*

ILLINOIS DOCUMENTS

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## H<sub>2</sub>O Outlook

Water may not be as plentiful  
as Illinoisans think



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Dana Hempel



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often mandated, and many residents place bricks in toilet tanks so each flush uses less water.

Not so here. It's not uncommon to see homeowners sweeping their driveways with garden hoses or scrubbing their decks with pressure washers. Here, water regularly falls

points out in his cover article. We are drawing down our Great Lakes and underground aquifers, and the time may not be far off when we, like other Americans in drier climates, could face shortages.

I've known Chris more than 15 years. When I first met him, his

our former Illinois Capitol bureau chief who now covers the Indiana Statehouse for a newspaper in the Calumet region — suburban Chicago — of the Hoosier State. On our pages this month, he writes about concerns that as gasoline prices soar, the corn-to-ethanol boom may cause food shortages in less-developed countries.



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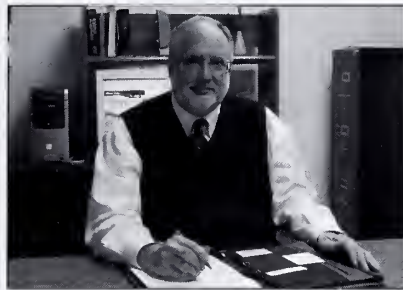
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Dana Heupel



## An issue that merits a special issue

by Dana Heupel

**A**s you're probably aware, this is our annual environmental issue. It isn't that we neglect environmental coverage the rest of the year; it's that the health of the planet that we leave to our children and theirs — in areas such as water, air and energy — is so important that it deserves the focus of an entire edition of any public policy magazine.

Our cover story targets an issue that isn't in the forefront of most Midwesterners' minds — that even this part of the nation is depleting and endangering its fresh water supply. Water conservation is highly visible in the West, where huge populations have settled on arid land. Many locales there restrict when — or if — residents can water their lawns. People are advised to turn off the faucet while shaving or brushing their teeth. Low-flow shower heads are often mandated, and many residents place bricks in toilet tanks so each flush uses less water.

Not so here. It's not uncommon to see homeowners sweeping their driveways with garden hoses or scrubbing their decks with pressure washers. Here, water regularly falls

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***We are drawing down our Great Lakes and underground aquifers, and the time may not be far off when we, like other Americans in drier climates, could face shortages.***

from the sky — this year in disastrous abundance. Why should we worry about shortages? There's always more, and sometimes too much.

That's a fallacy, as Chris Young points out in his cover article. We are drawing down our Great Lakes and underground aquifers, and the time may not be far off when we, like other Americans in drier climates, could face shortages.

I've known Chris more than 15 years. When I first met him, his

reputation as an enormously talented photojournalist was well-established, through his position on the staff of the *Springfield State Journal-Register* and the frequent appearance of his photos in various national publications. But little did I realize then that he also is a persistent reporter who rolls up his sleeves and digs — a skill he honed later as outdoors editor at the newspaper. Instead of relying only on the usual staple of guys grappling with big fish, Chris pored over state budgets for natural resource protections, wrote elegantly about land-use and conservation issues and added his deep interest and understanding about environmental matters to the newspaper's coverage of the outdoors. It's truly a pleasure to work with him again.

The same goes for Patrick Guinane, our former Illinois Capitol bureau chief who now covers the Indiana Statehouse for a newspaper in the Calumet region — suburban Chicago — of the Hoosier State. On our pages this month, he writes about concerns that as gasoline prices soar, the corn-to-ethanol boom may cause food shortages in less-developed countries.

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We also love frequent contributor Jim Krohe's curmudgeonly essays. In this issue, he postulates that our children might learn more about the natural world if we let them explore their backyards and neighborhoods on their own instead of through structured and supervised experiences in sequestered areas.

Two members of our staff also weigh in with environmental articles. Projects editor Beverley Scobell steps out from her usual role behind the scenes at the magazine to chronicle the increasing number of homeowners who want to go "off the grid," building or modifying their residences to generate their own energy. Statehouse bureau chief Bethany Jaeger looks at the problem of indoor air pollution as we increasingly inhabit sealed, controlled environments where we live and work.

And just so you don't think we're only about gloom and doom, we wanted to show you there are still some wonderful, wild places left in the state with a photo essay on state parks assembled by Adele Hodde of the Department of Natural Resources.

**We've updated the** look and feel of the *Illinois Issues* Web site, <http://illinoisissues.uis.edu>. We've added audio and video, a comments section, a place to publish additional photos, a search function and lots of links to other public policy sites. We hope you'll find it cleaner and easier to navigate. We intend to make more changes in the coming months. Please let us know what you think and what else you'd like to see.

Like every other print publication, we're excited about the opportunities the Internet provides to offer additional content, background and links to sites where our readers can go to find more information about the subjects we cover.

As a 10-times-a-year publication, it also gives us the same ability to provide immediate coverage as any other news medium — as we do in our blog and as we intend to do more

of on our main Web page — along with a place where readers can debate public policy in real time. But also like every other print publication, we're grappling with how to relate it to our original mission — in our case, a magazine whose stock in trade is in-depth analysis of the important issues of our time.

I worry that in the age of immediate news coverage from Internet sites and 24-hour broadcast news outlets, there's often not enough time to step back, take a breath and try to add perspective to a developing issue. In the zeal to get a competitive jump, and with nearly unlimited air time and broadband space to fill, every microscopic turn of the screw becomes an entirely new story of its own. And before viewers and readers have a chance to consider a subject fully, the news focus has moved onto something else. I certainly believe that's been the case in the coverage of the presidential elections this year.

The egalitarian nature of the Internet also gives a forum to anyone who can afford a connection — overall, a good thing. But as someone who researches issues for a living, I find it's becoming more and more difficult to weed out accurate information from opinion or distortion. I fear that if what is sometimes referred to as "mainstream" or "legacy" media disappear entirely, we as a society may devolve into a babel of voices that serve only to confuse — not to inform.

Such esoteric worries aside, we hope that our print and Internet versions of *Illinois Issues* can complement each other. Each medium has its strengths and limitations. Our job is to recognize how we can use those.

Just a reminder: This also is our combined July-August edition. We'll see you next, at least in our printed issue, in September. Tune into our Internet version until then. □

*Dana Heupel can be reached at [heupel.dana@uis.edu](mailto:heupel.dana@uis.edu).*



# Illinois Issues

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JUL 03 2008

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A publication of the University of Illinois at Springfield

July/August 2008

Volume XXXIV, No. 7 & 8



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*Subscription questions:* Illinois Issues, Subscription Division, P.O. Box 2795, Springfield, IL 62708-2795 or call 1-800-508-0266.

Hours are 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Central Time, Monday-Friday (except holidays). *Subscriptions:* \$39.95 one year/ \$72 two years/ \$105 three years; student rate is \$20 a year. Individual copy is \$5. Back issue is \$5. *Illinois Issues* is indexed in the PAIS Bulletin and is available electronically on our home page: <http://illinoisissues.uis.edu>. *Illinois Issues* (ISSN 0738-9663) is published monthly, except July and August are combined. December is published online only. Periodical postage paid at Springfield, IL, and additional mailing offices.

*Postmaster:* Send address changes to *Illinois Issues*, Subscription Division, P.O. Box 19243, Springfield, IL 62794-9243.

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*Illinois Issues* is published by Center Publications  
*Center for State Policy and Leadership*  
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Bethany Jaeger



## One feasibility study halts major changes to the state's long-term energy plan

by Bethany Jaeger

During the closing hours of their spring session, legislators debated whether the state should change its rules so a Nebraska-based energy company could invest in a central Illinois coal plant using pollution-control technology.

The plan fell just shy of the votes needed, further delaying the \$2.5 billion project that's been in the works for years.

It's the second time the General Assembly rejected the plan, making supporters question whether that's the final straw for Tenaska Inc. to give up on constructing the proposed Taylorville Energy Center.

"I'm not sure at this point whether Tenaska will be moving forward with their efforts," says Dave Lundy, Tenaska spokesman. "It's hard to construct a scenario that says, 'Yes, it's really worth spending more of your millions of dollars to develop this project in a state that doesn't appear to want you there.'"

The debate isn't just about one power plant. It includes decisions that would shape the state's energy portfolio and environmental impact for the next 30 years. And underlying all of those issues is the question of how consumers would be affected in the meantime.

At the center of the debate is Attorney General Lisa Madigan's office, which has a role to protect consumers. As electricity prices threaten to increase, the state's policy decisions affect the environment. So the attorney general steps in, says Susan

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*The debate isn't just about one power plant. It includes decisions that would shape the state's energy portfolio and environmental impact for the next 30 years.*

Hedman, Madigan's senior policy adviser.

"The attorney general feels strongly about playing a role in shaping policy because getting the policy right going forward will protect consumers and the environment a lot more efficiently than having to bring lawsuits after the fact," she says.

The intent of the legislation, **SB 1987**, is to set the standard that Illinois' energy portfolio include coal-fired power plants equipped with technology to drastically reduce pollution. But it also would have initiated a study to find out whether it would be feasible to build the so-called clean coal plant near Taylorville. The General Assembly would then review the study before deciding whether Tenaska could break ground.

Rep. Gary Hannig, whose district includes Taylorville, sponsors the measure. The Litchfield Democrat said during floor debate last spring that the study would allow the state to take the first small but

painless step to revive the state's coal industry because the plant would be required to use only Illinois coal. It also would be required to use technologies that capture harmful carbon dioxide emissions and prevent other pollutants from being produced in the first place.

"It seems to me that this is the kind of thing that we in Illinois need to be trying to promote so that we can see the coal that lies beneath our feet used in way that's burned cleanly, produces electricity, produces jobs, produces a tax base for us and does so in a way that doesn't cost consumers anything more than the normal kind of coal plant," Hannig said.

Republican Rep. Dave Winters of Shirland opposes the legislation because he says it was rushed and tried to do too many things in one step. He says, however, that he supports the study of the pollution-reducing technologies.

"Illinois-based coal is something that I would be very supportive of, but it's got to be a finished product. It can't be a bowl full of ideas thrown together and stirred up and then passed. All that means is that we'll have to come back and fix the problems," he says. "Let's work on it a little longer, make sure the cake is baked before we try to serve it up."

If the legislature enacted the House version, lawmakers also would take a step toward requiring utilities to buy electricity from the clean-burning coal plant, tightening pollution standards and offering



incentives to clean up existing coal plants that otherwise could go offline.

Under the proposal, if a new coal plant were active by 2015, it would have to capture about 50 percent of carbon dioxide emissions. Plants active by 2016 would have to capture 75 percent, and it goes to 90 percent for plants scheduled to be active after 2016. It also would have to limit emissions of sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide and mercury.

If any power plants couldn't meet the new standards, then the measure sets up a system for so-called carbon tax credits.

"Basically," Hedman says, "you're paying someone else not to pollute or you're talking about planting something that will sequester carbon."

That could include paying for the planting of a forest.

If the power plants still failed to satisfy the requirements, the attorney general could sue the owners to force them to live up to their contracts with the state.

Under the plan, as much as one-fourth of the electricity used in Illinois would be generated by clean coal facilities by January 1, 2025.

The long-term effect on consumers, however, isn't as defined.

Winters and Rep. Kevin McCarthy, an Orland Park Democrat, both receive their electricity from Commonwealth Edison, which serves northern Illinois. They say they expect that if the plan went forward, they would hear complaints from constituents about paying for power generated in the territory of Ameren Illinois, the major utility serving downstate.

Hedman says that wouldn't happen unless legislators first approved the results of the feasibility study, which would project the cost of the power, the impact on consumers' bills and the amount of money that Tenaska would expect to collect over time. Consumers would not pay for anything during construction of the plant.

If the plant were built and activated, then all customers, whether they received electricity through the major utilities or through alternative suppliers, would help pay for power supplied by the plant. But ComEd and Ameren utility customers would be protected by a cap on the annual percentage increase of the cost per kilowatt-hour.

Winters and McCarthy also say they heard no guarantees that the plan would

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***Opponents, however, are concerned that the measure would open the door to long-term contracts between utilities and power suppliers that could span 30 years.***

result in cheaper power or protect consumers if things didn't go as planned.

Hedman says the House version improves protections that weren't in the initial plan, which the Senate unanimously approved last summer. The attorney general's office opposed that legislation.

"We were worried that the smallest consumers in the state — residential and small businesses — would have been the ones that were bearing the highest costs and the largest risks for the plant," Hedman says.

She adds that the House version, if legislators approved the results of the study, would spread those costs across all customers in Illinois so that everyone would pay "their fair share."

Opponents, however, are concerned that the measure would open the door to long-term contracts between utilities and power suppliers that could span 30 years.

That's something Tenaska needs, according to Lundy, to stretch out the cost of the contract.

"You're talking about at least a \$2.5 billion project. You can't finance \$2.5 billion in three years," he says. "It's like trying to buy your house in three years instead of getting a 30-year mortgage."

Per the legislation, power suppliers also would be able to retrofit old coal plants with new pollution-controlling technologies. To do that, they would be able to propose financing the projects through long-term contracts with the new Illinois Power Agency.

The General Assembly approved legislation to create the independent agency to oversee the purchasing of power. It will buy electricity on behalf of the utilities, which will then distribute it to customers.

Hedman says the long-term contracts are intended to encourage companies to clean up old coal plants so they re-enter the mix of utilities' energy portfolios.

"We would look at that as consumer advocates, and we would say, 'Is this likely to be, over time, a lower cost than continuing to operate these plants and buying zillions of carbon credits every year?'"

The attorney general's office is confident that the Tenaska legislation could become law with more discussion to help legislators digest the complicated details of the plan. They already have consensus from some key groups, Hedman says.

"Even in the short time we had available, we had agreement between the coal companies and labor and environmentalists and consumers. And it's very rare that you get that kind of broad agreement. So, yes, we are optimistic."

The longer legislators wait to act, the higher the risk that Tenaska could abandon ship. The state could lose an opportunity to create as many as 1,500 full- and part-time jobs related to construction and 663 jobs related to plant operations, according to a study by Northern Illinois University's Regional Development Institute in DeKalb.

The project is not dead, however, if Tenaska pulls out, says Lundy. It would revert to the former developer, which could decide how to proceed.

But he warns that if Illinois fails to develop clean coal power plants before the aging plants go offline, then customers could expect their bills to spike. The state would increasingly rely on natural gas plants, which generate cleaner power. But it's far more expensive power because it's produced during times of highest demand, such as during the summer when other types of power plants can't keep up with air conditioning use.

"The more you rely on gas peaker plants, the more the market prices are set by the most expensive power possible," Lundy says. "That means that the price rises that we have seen in recent years, we ain't seen nothing yet."

Lawmakers may have to act soon to keep the plan alive. But even if legislators push the green button to initiate the feasibility study, they still have a chance to push the red button if the plant doesn't seem suitable to drastically change the state's long-term energy policy. □

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# BRIEFLY

## ENVIRONMENT

### Illinois cars not "clean" just yet

**B**uying a hybrid or other fuel-efficient car can involve a waiting list in Illinois, and a measure that would make them more readily available faces an uphill trek in the General Assembly.

Lawmakers want the state to join 14 others as a "clean car state" with stricter mileage standards for four-door passenger cars than those established by the federal government.

The proposal would link Illinois' requirements for fuel efficiency to

The plan faces resistance from auto manufacturers and the Illinois Chamber of Commerce.

Todd Maisch, the chamber's vice president for governmental affairs, says the effort would hurt consumers by forcing them into car purchases. "We're very concerned about consumers having access to the mix of vehicles they need."

Maisch adds the group also is concerned that Illinois policy would be dictated by another government body. "We're giving up a large portion of our

became law, the measure also would not apply to vehicles bought before then.

May says the legislation doesn't take away jobs, as critics contend, because workers would need to make fuel-efficient cars as gas-conscious drivers continue to transform the market. "If the American auto workers retooled and started building cars that people want, that would create more jobs."

She cites a study by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign that shows the state is missing out on the creation of manufacturing jobs because no hybrid cars are produced here.

Sport utility vehicles, trucks and light trucks would be exempt from the plan. Owners of newly produced cars that don't meet the standards would be unable to register their vehicles with the state. Car buyers would then be in violation of state law for purchasing a vehicle and not registering it with the state, subject to tickets and fines.

May says she hopes to advance the measure during the fall legislative session, which will start in November.

"I think the timing is absolutely with us because of the price of gas," she says.

Patrick O'Brien

Photograph by Patrick O'Brien



*Rep. Susana Mendoza waited three months to receive a Toyota Prius hybrid. Advocates say if Illinois adopts stricter mileage standards, such fuel-efficient vehicles would be more readily available.*

California's. Clean car states require newly produced vehicles to be at least 6 to 9 miles per gallon more efficient on average than federal standards.

Hybrids, which run on a mixture of gasoline and electricity, would be easier to buy under the proposal, according to Rep. Susana Mendoza, a Chicago Democrat. Supply would be more likely to catch up with demand because carmakers would have more incentive to ship the vehicles to clean car states. She waited three months for a hybrid to become available in Chicago.

sovereignty to another state."

Rep. Karen May, a Highland Park Democrat leading the effort as sponsor of **HB 3424**, says Illinois would be able to opt out of the deal if California's standards became too strict.

"This is one of those issues where corporate America is fighting it," she says. "I believe that the average person on the street wants to see it."

The plan would require automakers to comply with the law for the 2012 model year to give carmakers time to change their business practices. If it

Photograph by Patrick O'Brien



*The center console of a Prius tells drivers how they're saving gasoline and whether the car is using battery power or fuel. The car can achieve upward of 50 miles per gallon of gas.*



# LEGISLATIVE CHECKLIST

*The Illinois General Assembly wrapped up its spring session late on May 31, the last day lawmakers could approve a state budget without needing Republican votes in the House. But because they approved spending of up to \$2 billion more than they anticipated in revenues, Gov. Rod Blagojevich is left with deciding how to balance the budget.*

*Legislators could be called back to Springfield before their annual fall session, or they could wait until then and consider revenue-generating ideas after the November elections. While some other substantive issues also received legislative approval by the time lawmakers left the capital, some are expected to be vetoed or changed by the governor. Others failed to win approval but could come back this fall.*

## **Ethics reform**

**HB 824** Holders of state contracts totaling more than \$50,000 would no longer be able to donate to the political campaigns of the officeholders who awarded the contracts, under a measure on the governor's desk. While the General Assembly unanimously approved the legislation, the governor has vowed to "improve" the bill. Critics believe he will attempt to prevent it from taking effect. If enacted, the reforms also would ban family members and anyone with a significant share in a business from donating to officeholders.

## **Pension refinancing**

**SB 788** A last-minute, \$16 billion pension bond deal that would provide hundreds of millions of dollars to balance the state budget passed the Senate but was not called for a vote in the House. The state would have floated bonds and earned interest to help pay down its \$42 billion public employee pension liability. The sponsor, Sen. Don Harmon, an Oak Park Democrat, says the deal would help the state come closer to fully funding its obligations 11 years earlier than the current projection of 2045. The measure would require a three-fifths majority to pass the House. It could be reconsidered in the fall.

## **Campus violence**

**SB 1881** Individuals who make threats of large-scale violence would be denied bail while the threat is investigated, under a measure from Sen. William Haine, an Alton Democrat. It awaits the governor's signature. The proposal would slow down the legal process so police could properly investigate threats of campus violence, Haine says. The measure is in response to threats made at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville last year, as well as the mass shootings at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb.

## **All Kids accountability**

**HB 1533** A measure demanding accountability and transparency from the state's All Kids health insurance program passed both chambers. Sponsored by Rep. Rosemary Mulligan, a Des Plaines Republican, the legislation also would require the state auditor general's office to perform an annual review of the program and require the administration to publicly disclose the premiums paid by patients. Officials also would have to disclose all costs of the program and all contracts awarded.

## **Child predators**

**SB 2382** Both legislative chambers approved a proposal to protect children from Internet sex offenders. Sponsored by Carol Stream Republican Sen. John Millner, the measure would create the offense of "grooming" a child, which would cover an adult's attempt to communicate with a minor and knowingly use the Internet to seduce or solicit the child to commit a sex offense. A crime also would occur when the adult travels any distance to meet with the child.

## **Internet safety**

**SB 2512** State schools would be required to teach children beginning in third grade how to stay safe on the Internet in a measure that is on the governor's desk. Sponsored by Sen. Terry Link, a Waukegan Democrat, the

legislation would require school districts to start the classes in fall 2009 to instruct students about inappropriate or illegal communications and solicitation, Internet threats and bullying, child predators, fraud and other dangers.

## **Trans fat in schools**

**SB 2858** An attempt to ban unhealthy trans fats from school lunches won Senate approval but faces an uncertain future in the House. The sponsor, Rep. LaShawn Ford, a Chicago Democrat, could bring it back for consideration in the fall. The proposal would require the Illinois State Board of Education to ban the use of vegetable oils containing trans fats in cafeteria foods beginning in 2009. All foods containing trans fats would be banned in public schools by 2010.

## **Hospital payments**

**SB 2857** About 200 hospitals in Illinois could receive up to \$4.5 billion in federal Medicaid reimbursements over five years, with the hospitals serving the most needy patients receiving the most. Illinois already has employed a smaller-scale plan that secured \$2.3 billion over the past three years. The new proposal, approved by both legislative chambers, needs the governor's signature and federal approval to take effect. The funds also could be used for hospital equipment and technology upgrades.

## **Con-Con**

**HJR 111** The state is laying the groundwork for the November referendum that will ask voters whether a constitutional convention should be convened to revise the state charter. The General Assembly will create a commission to educate the public and to write arguments for and against calling a convention. Per state law, the question must be posed to voters every 20 years and requires a majority of votes for a convention to take place.



## LEGISLATIVE CHECKLIST



### Popular vote

**HB 1685** Illinois has joined two other states in demanding the president be elected by national popular vote instead of the Electoral College. Blagojevich signed the measure that places Illinois into an agreement that would require each state and the District of Columbia to give their electoral votes to the candidate who wins the national popular vote.



### Transportation funds

**HB 5215** The state provided \$20 million in additional funds to the Illinois Department of Transportation for the rest of the fiscal year that ended June 30. The department had ceased nonessential services such as cleaning up roadkill from state roads and landscaping highway medians because it ran out of money after the harsh winter.

The governor approved the funding, which also increased state assistance for downstate transit districts from 55 percent to 65 percent as part of a deal to save Chicago-area mass transit from financial peril.



### Free rides

**SB 1920** Disabled persons under a certain income would be eligible to ride regularly scheduled public transportation for free under a measure approved by both chambers and sent to the governor. The measure does not, however, dedicate funding to cover the decrease in fares currently collected by the transit districts.



### E-Verify

**SB 1878** The House rejected a measure that would have discouraged employers from using an employment verification database to make sure job applicants were legal citizens. Sponsored by Rep. Cynthia Soto, a Chicago Democrat, the proposal attempted to give employers flexibility in using the database until it is 99.9 percent accurate. A previous state law banning use of the database to check immigration status did not survive a legal challenge.

*Patrick O'Brien and Bethany Jaeger*

## State budget roundup

After last summer's uncertainty, state workers should continue to receive paychecks in the fiscal year that started July 1. Lawmakers hammered out an 11th-hour budget deal, but the state's fiscal picture is far from balanced and likely unfinished.

Legislators approved a \$59 billion budget hours before the constitutional deadline of May 31, but Gov. Rod Blagojevich said the budget violates the state Constitution because it spends more than it is projected to take in. Estimates place it in the range of \$1 billion to \$2 billion out of whack.

Under the spending plan approved by the General Assembly, some programs would receive modest increases, including a 2.8 percent hike for higher education and a \$525 million boost for public schools. Medicaid providers, however, would continue to wait an average of 70 days for state reimbursement.

The House and Senate budget negotiators agreed to hold the line on spending for other programs. On the other hand, they disagreed on how to pay for the new increases. The House never considered the Senate's plan to sweep unused monies from dedicated funds, which would have made \$530 million available for school construction and Medicaid payments. They also ignored a \$16 billion pension bond deal that would have freed up \$800 million to balance the budget and refinance the state's \$42 billion pension debt.

Rep. Gary Hannig, a Litchfield Democrat and budgeteer, says the governor is obligated to trim the budget where he sees fit.

This year's cuts could represent four times the amount the governor vetoed from last year's budget, when Blagojevich stripped nearly \$500 million in a move that legislators alleged was politically motivated.

A possible target for cuts this time around is higher education. Blagojevich previously vowed to cut funding for public institutions if the legislature rejected the idea of sweeping unused funds.

House Minority Leader Tom Cross of

Oswego said House Democrats yielded the power of the veto pen to someone they repeatedly have said they distrust. "The ironic thing is you're going to have the governor be the adult in the situation."

A \$27 billion portion of the budget passed the House without any debate, with House Republicans saying Democrats denied them the right to speak.

If the governor doesn't call legislators back into special session this summer, the General Assembly could consider any budget cuts or revenue ideas this fall.

*Patrick O'Brien and Bethany Jaeger*

## Capital construction plan stalls, for now

Many of Illinois' roads, schools and public transportation districts will continue to wait for much-needed repairs after lawmakers failed to agree on a \$34 billion capital plan. But Gov. Rod Blagojevich and legislative leaders promised to keep negotiating the plan this summer and could reconsider proposals during the General Assembly's fall session in November.

The proposal fell apart in the House because some Democrats, including Speaker Michael Madigan, opposed funding the program through leasing the Illinois Lottery and by allowing up to three new gaming facilities, including a Chicago casino, and adding slot machines at racetracks.

Former U.S. House Speaker Dennis Hastert, a Republican, and Southern Illinois University President Glenn Poshard, a Democrat, led negotiations. What they came up with, Poshard said during a Statehouse news conference in May, was a plan that was "just right" for all the parties.

Supporters estimate a capital plan would generate thousands of construction jobs and other new employment opportunities and help the state's flagging economy.

However, a House committee rejected the lottery lease, which nixed the entire capital proposal.





**Southern Illinois University President Glenn Poshard refers to revenue ideas that would help fund the \$34 billion capital plan that he and former U.S. House Speaker Dennis Hastert negotiated with legislative leaders and the governor.**

A key sticking point to any capital program is the nonrelationship between Madigan and Blagojevich. Madigan did not attend any of the leaders' meetings on a capital plan and said he does not return Blagojevich's phone calls because the governor chooses to lead through "confrontation" and "threats."

House Majority Leader Barbara Flynn Currie attended those meetings on Madigan's behalf. Currie, however, voted against the lottery lease in committee. She cited concerns about the long-term effects of leasing the asset, which generates about \$600 million a year for education.

Poshard also met with Madigan privately and said the speaker raised no objections.

Another hurdle is that rank-and-file lawmakers repeatedly have said they don't trust the governor to spend the money where it's needed.

Rep. Jack Franks, a Woodstock Democrat, railed against the governor's "broken promises," while Blagojevich stood 20 feet away on the House floor lobbying other legislators to support the plan.

Blagojevich has called for more meetings of the legislative leaders. The first meeting took place without Madigan, who said May 31, "I'm not prepared to give up on a capital bill."

*Patrick O'Brien and Bethany Jaeger*

## Governor's former adviser heads to jail

Antoin "Tony" Rezko is in federal prison as he awaits his sentence September 3. A federal jury found him guilty of 16 of 24 counts of corruption, including mail fraud and money laundering, in a scheme to collect illegal kickbacks from companies seeking to do business with two state boards.

U.S. Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald previously called the case a "pay-to-play scheme on steroids."

Rezko was found not guilty of one of the most serious charges of attempted extortion, involving an alleged \$1.5 million bribe.

The Wilmette businessman was a top fundraiser and unofficial adviser to Gov. Rod Blagojevich, who was mentioned in the 13-week trial as "Public Official A" but who has not been charged with any wrongdoing.

Blagojevich gave a brief public statement in Chicago after the verdict June 4. He described Rezko as a friend and supporter and said he was sad for Rezko and his family. "The jury's

decision is yet another reminder that ours is a system of government that is ruled by laws, and not by men. I respect the decision made by the jury. As for me, I will continue to get up every single day to work as hard as I possibly can for the people."

Rezko's attorneys plan to appeal the verdict, but Rezko also awaits trial on a second set of charges of business fraud involving his pizza franchise.

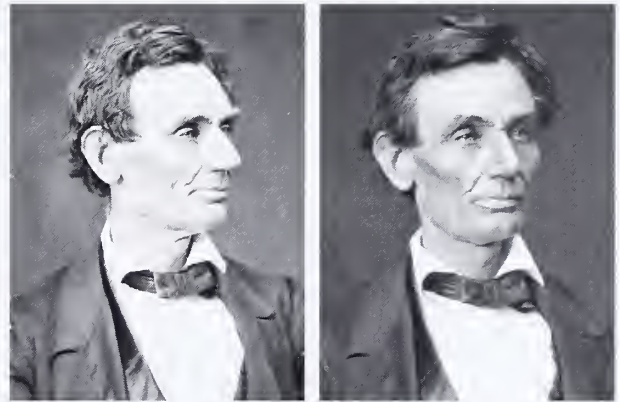
Political science professor Kent Redfield at the University of Illinois at Springfield says prosecutors could try to negotiate with Rezko for his cooperation on other ongoing investigations involving the administration's hiring practices and the governor's political campaign.

Redfield adds that the Rezko verdict damages the governor's credibility and makes him weaker politically, as does a related guilty plea of Ali Ata, former executive director of the Illinois Finance Authority, that alleges Rezko was instrumental in hiring Ata in exchange for his hefty contributions to Blagojevich's campaign.

*Bethany Jaeger*

## Limited Edition Hesler prints now available

Alexander Hesler's companion portraits of presidential candidate Abraham Lincoln, taken in Springfield on June 3, 1860, are stunning photographs. Exposed on 8" x 10" light-sensitive glass plates, the images are among the most eloquent and revealing of Illinois' greatest statesman before he left Springfield for Washington.



The Illinois State Historical Society acquired the glass plate positives (the original negatives are in the Smithsonian, damaged beyond repair) and has commissioned archive-quality prints of the Hesler portraits.

In anticipation of the Lincoln Bicentennial in 2009, The Society now offers a limited edition (500) of the 16" x 20" Hesler Lincoln Portraits (shown above), double matted and beautifully framed (choice of natural wood or gilt) with non-glare glass and adorned with a simple brass plate: *A. Lincoln, June 3, 1860*. The photographs are sold only in pairs for \$1,000, plus shipping and applicable sales tax for non-members.

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## Chemicals in plastics spark legislative debate

Using a fluorescent X-ray gun, Max Muller directed a beam into a Curious George doll to read what elements it contained. The monkey's face had 4,340 parts per million lead. That exceeds Illinois' statutory limit of lead levels to 600 parts per million in toys.

"Curious George is probably violating current law in Illinois," said Muller, an advocate for Chicago-based Environment Illinois. He tested products in legislators' Springfield offices this spring to promote an effort to ban the sale of certain products that contain what he believes are harmful chemicals.

The laser gun, however, doesn't reveal whether the chemicals are emitted from the product or if the children absorb them. "It just tells us what's in it," he says.

As environmental health groups campaign to curb the use of the chemicals, Illinois lawmakers are confronted with contradictory studies that even the federal government or the European Union haven't sorted out.

On one hand, environmentalists in Illinois want to ban the sale of products that contain bisphenol A, used in baby food containers and canned foods, and phthalates, which make such toys as rubber ducks soft and flexible. Muller's group cites research that shows bisphenol A can disrupt hormones and childhood development, contributing to diseases, obesity and cancer. They point to other kinds of plastics that don't use the chemical and don't break down when repeatedly heated.

The chemical industry, on the other hand, argues that other research shows there's no real risk. Steven Hentges, executive director of a group representing manufacturers, Polycarbonate BPA Global Group based in Virginia, testified before a Senate committee in the spring that bisphenol A actually protects baby food containers from rusting or contaminating the food.

Professor Frederick Vom Saal of the University of Missouri in Columbia, also testified at the committee. He says the

chemical industry's studies fail to consider the effects at a deeper, molecular level.

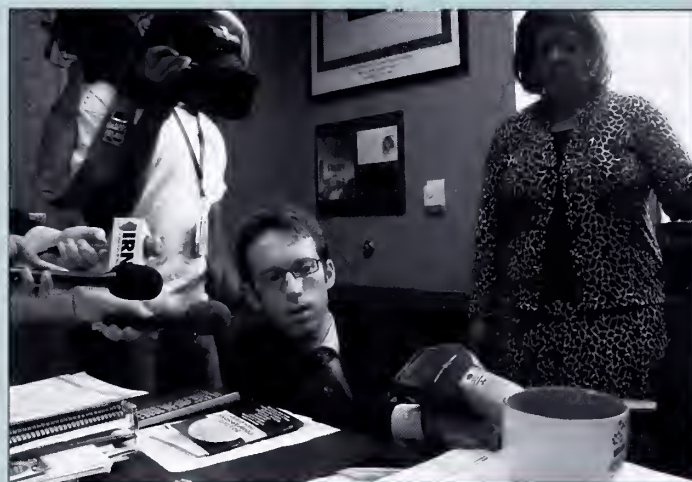
Muller adds that some people are exposed to levels found to have caused health problems in rats. "And you have to consider cumulative sources of exposure."

Mark Beil, executive director of the Chemical Industry Council of Illinois based in Des Plaines, says the environmental groups use fear mongering. Just because traces of the chemicals can be found in human bloodstreams doesn't mean they're harmful, he says.

Illinois lawmakers opted to delay a measure that would make Illinois the first in the nation to ban the sale of baby bottles and canned formulas that use the chemical. Opponents argue the issue would be better addressed by federal and international officials.

The sponsor, Democratic Sen. Dan Kotowski of Park Ridge, says he plans to pursue the measure this fall.

Bethany Jaeger



Max Muller, advocate for Chicago-based Environment Illinois, uses a fluorescent X-ray gun to test chemical elements of a coffee cup.

## Biologists target invasive plant

Illinois Department of Natural Resources biologists are making progress in curtailing an invasive aquatic perennial that had been choking off fish at Mermet Lake in far southern Illinois.

Curlyleaf pondweed (*Potamogeton crispus*) is native to parts of Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia and was introduced to the United States in the mid-1880s for use as an aquarium plant. The small, branched plant has wavy edges and, at its peak bloom, forms a matted cover. North of Metropolis in a 3,074-acre conservation area, Mermet Lake serves as a perfect breeding ground for the pondweed, says Steve

Shults, aquatic nuisance species program manager for the Department of Natural Resources. "It's really shallow with an average depth at around four feet."

One threat of the invasion is that the plant could spread to the Cache River, which connects to Mermet Lake, says Chris Bickers, a fisheries biologist for the department.

The invasive species first appeared at Mermet Lake in 1999, and by 2002 the plant spread to the point of nearly covering the entire body of water. The end result was oxygen deprivation of fish in the lake. Natural Resources officials had previously been unsuccessful in killing off the pondweed with herbicides, but this year a new treatment

— funded by a grant program for tackling all types of invasive species in Illinois — cut pondweed growth back. The herbicide called fluridone, which can be used in low doses for long-term control, held down the pondweed. The \$25,000 in herbicide was purchased through a \$56,000 federal grant for fiscal year 2008 targeted at invasive species in Illinois.

Curlyleaf dies off in the winter and blooms in the spring at a rapid rate.

"It's greatly reduced," Bickers says. "Last year it was covered to the point you couldn't drive a boat through it."

Tackling the pondweed will be a multiyear process — up to five years if funding continues to be available.

Maureen Foertsch McKinney



## QUOTABLE

“This order is not to give either the governor nor Speaker Madigan an advantage in their ongoing rift. Throughout Illinois history, until now, this state’s leaders have collaborated on special legislative sessions without resort to the judiciary.”

*Sangamon County Court Judge Leo Zappa, who ruled that the governor has the authority to proclaim the time and date when the General Assembly must convene special sessions. Gov. Rod Blagojevich sued House Speaker Michael Madigan for convening special sessions at different times than the governor’s proclamation stated last summer. Zappa’s ruling, however, does not require the speaker to ensure a quorum is present. Without a quorum, the legislature cannot conduct business.*

## Updates

- The U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear the appeal of former Gov. George Ryan’s federal corruption conviction. Ryan is serving his six-and-a-half-year sentence at a minimum-security federal facility in Terre Haute, Ind. (see *Illinois Issues*, May 2008, page 35). The only remaining option is a commutation by President George W. Bush before the end of his term in January.

- U.S. District Judge Robert W. Gettleman ruled that Illinois school districts cannot hold the daily moment of silence approved in October 2007 by the state legislature (see *Illinois Issues*, February, page 25).

- The Chicago City Council approved a controversial plan to move the Chicago Children’s Museum from Navy Pier to Grant Park (see *Illinois Issues*, April, page 14).

- Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich signed a bill renewing film tax credit legislation (see *Illinois Issues*, May, page 14).

- The U.S. Senate approved a supplemental bill allocating \$250 million funding that in part will benefit Illinois’ Fermilab and Argonne National Laboratory (see *Illinois Issues*, May, page 31).

## Illinois builder to represent USA in Olympics project

Moline-based Alternative Energy Builders (AEB) has constructed one of several “new generation homes” to be showcased during the 2008 Beijing Olympics. The Olympics Future House Community Project is 10 houses, each built by a different country, that demonstrate the latest in sustainable and energy-efficient building technologies and practices.

“The exciting part of this project is the incorporation of American jobs,” says AEB owner George Bialecki Jr. “We hope that we can show the world that the U.S. does want to reduce emissions and can be a part of the new ‘green collar’ industry.”

Bialecki developed and trademarked a whole-house building practice called Home Biology 101 that views the home as a living organism, which breathes, absorbs environmental elements and produces waste. He says building to standards of energy efficiency, indoor air quality, water conservation, storm water management and recycling costs less than conventional building practices. Homeowners have more control over their energy prices and enjoy a more than 60 percent reduction in their carbon footprint and municipal water consumption. Bialecki offers an example of a customer’s 2,000-square-

## MOVEMENT

### Chicago eyes fair trade policy

Chicago may soon become the state’s “fair trade city,” joining the already 50-plus municipalities across the nation that have chosen the fair trade path.

Fair trade is a social and marketing based movement to reduce poverty and increase environmental sustainability between developed and developing countries. While fair trade initiatives remain a micro market, the movement has growing support in city halls across the nation.

The Chicago City Council has proposed a Fair Trade Resolution. As local policy, fair trade promotes access to markets and goods that empower people and build mutually beneficial relationships here and abroad.

“Fair trade helps ensure greater regional economic stability, peace, democracy, and eco-friendly business practices, all of which help to reduce global warming and natural resource scarcity that affects everyone, and not just Chicago,” says Toni

Preckwinkle, 4th Ward alderman.

While fair trade is a social movement, post-9/11 it also is a security concern. The Environmental Literacy Council links war and civil disorder to economic instability, poverty, environmental destruction and climate change.

State Rep. Barbara Flynn Currie, a Chicago Democrat whose district includes Preckwinkle’s 4th Ward, says no one has proposed fair trade as a state-based policy.

The Windy City has already taken policy leadership roles on environmental issues (see *Illinois Issues*, June, page 16).

Nancy Jones, spokeswoman for Chicago Fair Trade, says the Chicagoland market could support at least 300 fair trade outlets. She’d like to see other Illinois communities follow Chicago and become fair trade cities “by promoting policies that favor fair trade at living wage conditions.” When that occurs, she says, “poorer nations enjoy political and environmental stability and are less prone to exhaust or destroy their natural resources, which benefits us all.”

*Tony Hamelin*

foot home that has a utility bill that ranges from \$70 to \$100 a month year round.

"By saving homeowners over 70 percent in their utility bills, their homes will appreciate much quicker than conventional housing, while reducing energy consumption and living healthier."

The Beijing Future House, which incorporates more than nine cargo containers of American products, was built using an envelope of structural insulated panels, the first of its kind in China. The home showcases geothermal, solar thermal and solar shingles for heating and cooling, with an energy storage system using fuel cell technology. Floors, cabinets, doors and other surfaces were treated with nontoxic paints and finishes. It has a sustainable septic system that recycles and filters sanitation into nonpotable water for irrigation. Landscaping includes permeable pavers that allow storm water to soak into the ground.

All of the environmental features will be monitored by a touch screen energy management system that will

give up-to-the-minute data on energy consumption — geothermal and solar use, cost of energy per hour — and indoor air quality. Bialecki says eventually this technology will be standard in homes, "just like your wall thermostat."

"The homeowner will be able to even see how many trees they are adding back into the environment and their carbon footprint reduction."

*Beverley Scobell*

## Measure aims to keep electronics out of landfills

The Illinois House has approved a plan to recycle electronic equipment, and the Senate is expected to follow.

"The objective of the legislation (SB 2313) is to provide a statewide program for recycling e-waste: televisions, computers, cell phones," says state Sen. Susan Garrett, a Lake Forest Democrat and the measure's chief sponsor. "The program draws in the manufacturers to provide the funding for collecting e-waste. It works with local municipalities and counties to set

programs, and it also reaches out to the recycling industry."

By 2012, televisions, computer monitors, desktop and laptop computers and printers would be banned from landfills, if the measure is approved as expected in the fall veto session.

If enacted, Illinois would become the 14th state to provide electronics recycling legislation. The first state, California, charges consumers \$5 to \$10 for recycling a piece of electronic waste, while Garrett says Illinois' approach is to put the cost for funding the program on manufacturers.

Under the plan, manufacturers are expected to meet a percentage of Illinois' recycling goal. Incentives to recycle include getting extra credit for collecting obsolete electronics in rural areas and donating refurbished products to schools, underprivileged families, children and people with disabilities.

A major goal of the legislation, Garrett says, is "removing many of the toxic components we're trying to eliminate from landfills."

In the United States, it is estimated that 2.6 million tons of electronic waste is generated in a year, and only 13

## U of I goes green

The other two campuses of the University of Illinois will join the University of Illinois at Chicago in creating offices aimed at promoting green thinking.

The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the University of Illinois at Springfield are expected to open specialized sustainability offices this fall, while UIC's has been running since January.

"I think it's great the university as a whole is going to do this," says Cynthia Klein-Banai, the interim associate chancellor for sustainability at UIC. The university is part of an evolving trend, she says. "The movement of sustainability at campuses is growing at an exponential level."

The concept of sustainability, in general, includes conserving energy and natural resources, recycling and selecting building materials that are environmentally friendly. UIC's office has focused on education, research, energy conservation and the use of the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program, which certifies that construction meets green building standards. Another component of the UIC effort is a Web site that communicates sustainability efforts on campus.

Energy conservation measures are in place at all three universities already. At UIUC, for instance, the campus aims to cut energy use by 10 percent over the next three years and will renovate and replace ineffective heating, ventilating and air-conditioning systems, says Terry Ruprecht, the director of energy conservation. "As we begin to

upgrade the buildings, it will pay energy benefits at the same time." In May, the campus began nighttime shutdowns of HVAC systems and changes in temperature settings in most campus buildings.

The campus also is involved in research such as the use of biodiesel fuels in university vehicles and the installation of a wind turbine. Students in 2002 and 2007 approved fee increases totaling \$7 to provide sustainability grants for research.

The Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation also awarded the campus more than \$4 million in grants that will help pay for the wind turbine, the bioenergy research project and lighting upgrades.

Meanwhile, UIS will build a new residence hall with a green roof (made from sedums, hardy plants with water-restoring leaves) and has updated lighting through \$231,500 in grants from the clean energy foundation, says Harry Berman, provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs. Also, the UIS field station at the Emiquon Preserve on the Illinois River incorporated several green building techniques, including geothermal heating and cooling.

At all three campuses, teaching will be part of sustainability efforts.

"Another big factor that we have going for us is a very strongly committed environmental studies program that is helping to provide guidance for us not only in the education area ... but also in terms of consulting on new steps we would take in the area of sustainability and conservation," Berman says.

*Maureen Foertsch McKinney*



percent of that is recycled, says Joseph Schacter, senior policy advocate with the Chicago-based Environmental Law and Policy Center.

"The other 87 percent ends up in landfills or Third World countries," Schacter says. When shipped abroad, the material tends not to be recycled, he says, but instead "becomes mountains of toxic trash. The U.S. EPA has made it clear that even a tiny amount of these chemicals leaching into the groundwater is a problem," he says. Those chemicals include mercury, lead and cadmium.

The bill gives manufacturers two years before they are penalized for failing to meet the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency's recycling goals. (The original goal is 2.5 pounds per capita, which is based on Maine's experience. The following year, the goal will be based on how much Illinois manufacturers recycle.) In 2012, according to the bill, manufacturers that fail to meet 60 percent of the goal set would be charged a 70-cent-per-pound penalty. That benchmark would be raised to 75 percent in 2013.

"We support the concept — with this particular bill, our concerns are what we believe to be excessive fees and goals for the manufacturers," says Mark Denzler, vice president of government affairs and member relations for the Illinois Manufacturers' Association.

*Maureen Foertsch McKinney*

## High-school students earn top honors

Fourteen Illinois juniors and seniors were recognized by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency as Student Historians of the Year for 2008. Four of those were singled out for special awards for the best-written and best-researched essays. Each received a \$50 prize and had their essays published in the agency's *Illinois History* magazine.

The program is designed to encourage high school students to use research materials and develop an interest in their communities and their state, says Keith Sculle, head of Education Services for the agency.

University Laboratory High School in Urbana took home two of the top honors. Robert Diehl won the Junior Research Award for his essay, "Forging a Pan-Ethnic Identity: The Founding of the Asian American Studies Program at the University of Illinois." Brian Wang won the Junior Writing Award for "Immigration Essay: Chinese Heritage School." Their teacher is Adele Suslick.

"First of all, we have some very smart kids," principal Steve Epperson says of the students' success. But he credits the four social studies teachers — one of whom was a Golden Apple finalist — for the emphasis on history. "All the teachers just have a passion for it, which I think comes across to the kids."

The other top historians are Jamie Ehrenpreis of Niles North High School in Skokie and Morgan O'Neill of Carbondale Community High School. Jamie won the Senior Research Award for her essay, "Yiddish Theater: A Hope in the Face of Hardship for Eastern European Jewish Immigrants in Chicago, 1880s to 1940s." Her teacher is Sarah Stucky. Morgan won the Senior

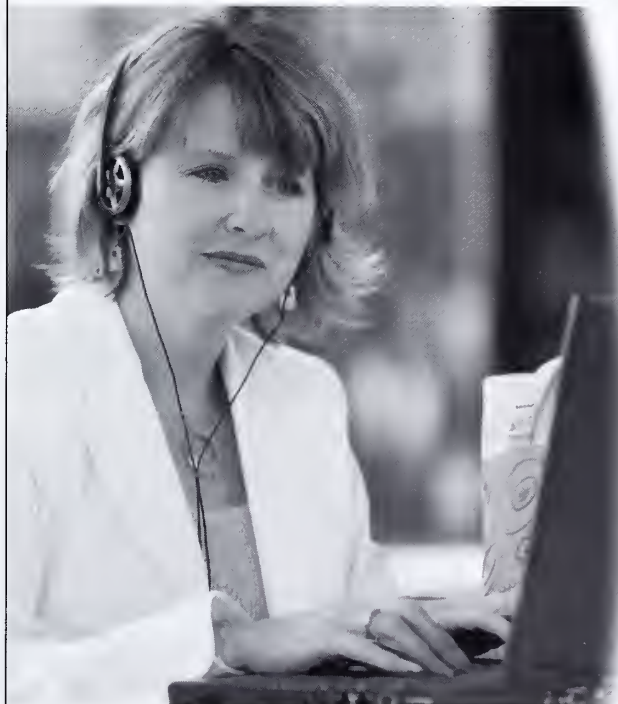
Writing Award for "Lincoln vs. Douglas Debate: A Fight for Basic Human Rights." Her teacher is Nick Weshinskey, who had two other students, Quentin White-Westerfield and Shuangyi Hou, recognized for their essays.

"We are fortunate to be able to go to the Lincoln library at the beginning of each school year to do some research," says Weshinskey. "The people at the [Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield] have been extremely helpful. We really get a good running start."

Reaching the statewide History Expo, held May 8 at the Prairie Capital Convention Center in Springfield, is the pinnacle achievement for the state's budding historians, says Sculle. However, from the acre of exhibits, displays, performances and papers judged this year, 52 students were chosen from more than 1,400 participants to represent Illinois at the National History Day competition at the University of Maryland in College Park.

*Beverley Scobell*

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# H<sub>2</sub>Outlook

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Water may not be as plentiful as Illinoisans think

story and photographs by Chris Young

Photograph by Chris Young



Everyone knows what happens when you withdraw more from a bank account than you deposit into it.

And with heavy rains swelling rivers and keeping farmers on the sidelines this spring, it might be hard to believe Illinois' bank account of fresh water could ever be in the red. But with a growing population, especially in north-eastern Illinois, demand for water for residences, power generation, agriculture and other uses likely will continue to increase. Some communities already are forecasting water shortages by the year 2020.

Joyce O'Keefe, deputy director of Openlands, an urban conservation organization in the Chicago region, says availability of fresh water will be "one of the great issues of our time."

Openlands collaborated on a published report looking at the future of Illinois' water supply, *Troubled Waters: Meeting Future Water Needs in Illinois*. The publication points out that many of Illinois' sources of water already are at legal or natural limits.

Over the past century and a half, people have learned some hard lessons about the limits of seemingly limitless natural resources. In Western states especially, where water is less abundant, conservation has been a visible issue for many years. But many Midwesterners only now are beginning to understand that their water supply also is exhaustible.

O'Keefe says most Americans accept that changes in behavior will be necessary



to keep water flowing for everyone. But it's not enough to simply tell people they will have to conserve water — such as to turn off the tap while brushing their teeth or cutting back on watering the lawn. They need to know why they need to conserve.

To learn why, Illinois residents need to look closely at the lakes, rivers, streams, aquifers and wetlands that move, store and filter water. To examine those pieces of the puzzle is to learn how they are interconnected. Illinois citizens draw water from all of those sources. The health of one part affects the health of the others — and the health and wealth of Illinois citizens.

Illinois, bordering on Lake Michigan, is a water-rich state. Together, the Great

sewage away from the lake and directing it toward the Illinois River basin. Since then, concerns have been voiced about how much water is diverted from the Great Lakes.

In 1967, the U.S. Supreme Court limited how much water Great Lakes states could divert. Currently, the City of Chicago's limit is 3,200 cubic feet per second, about half of which (1 billion gallons a day) flows down the Chicago River.

"I grew up in the Chicago area, and my guess is that it would be unimaginable to most people 50 years ago that those Great Lakes might run dry," says O'Keefe.

Retreating shorelines could have catastrophic economic and ecological results.

*Photograph by Chris Young*



*Wetlands, like this one in Mason County, store rainwater to keep it from running off and harbor a diversity of plants and animals.*

Lakes account for about one-fifth of the planet's fresh water — a resource that is the envy of the world. Glaciers that advanced and retreated across the region over millennia scooped out the softest rocks and earth, leaving behind the basins that would fill to become the Great Lakes.

In the late 1800s, Chicago residents learned they could not simply abuse the seemingly endless water supply of Lake Michigan. Before 1900, when the direction of the Chicago River's flow was reversed, sewage flowed into the lake — the same place the city got its drinking water.

Epidemics of diseases like cholera caused engineers to attempt the feat of directing the city's sewage away from Lake Michigan.

In 1900, the Chicago River's flow was effectively reversed, carrying the city's

"The ports along the Great Lakes would find they are no longer functional," she says. "If you think of the development along the Great Lakes, imagine what it might look like if the lake would recede half a mile."

Rivers, streams and wetlands associated with the lakes might find their relationship changed forever. The Chicago region is considered one of the most biologically rich in the world, partly because of the diverse habitats and natural features that are part of the lake's shoreline and beyond.

As the last glaciers melted, the shoreline of Lake Michigan, known as Lake Chicago, was much expanded. As the shoreline retreated to its current position, it left behind an amazing array of wetlands, prairies, dunes and other habitats, some

extremely rare.

From the wetlands of the Calumet region to the shifting sands of the Indiana Dunes, the region is home to endangered species from the Karner blue butterfly to the piping plover, a tiny, plump shorebird.

With tremendous population growth expected — at least an additional 2 million people added in northeastern Illinois alone — pressure to further tap water supplies will increase. The number of people living in the most densely populated corner of the state is expected to increase from 6.8 million to 9 million by 2020 and reach 10 million by 2030.

That's not including outside pressure from those in arid climates who would love to pipe, truck or ship in some water from the Great Lakes.

O'Keefe says a proposal was suggested a few years back to fill ships with water and sail them to China. That idea didn't float, but O'Keefe says that even though laws protect the Great Lakes water, pressure to share outside bordering states will continue.

"This isn't just a 'someday somebody will make that type of proposal' thing," she says.

From the observation deck of the John Hancock Center in downtown Chicago, Lake Michigan seems to go on forever. But Illinois also has vast stores of water below the surface of the ground — out of sight, but not out of mind.

Aquifers, such as the Mahomet Aquifer that stretches below much of east central Illinois, from the Illinois River near Havana east to Indiana, often are described as underground lakes or rivers. But that is not entirely accurate.

The Mahomet Aquifer is made up of vast underground deposits of sand and gravel that store water for people, farms, businesses and communities lucky enough to be located above it. The credit again goes to the glaciers that left sand and gravel deposits behind when they melted and retreated from Illinois.

Aquifers store water below the surface where it resides in the open space between grains of sand and chunks of rock.

Underground aquifers receive rainwater soaking through the ground and in turn recharge rivers, streams, lakes and wetlands with the outflow.

Gary Clark of the Illinois Department



of Natural Resources Office of Water Resources compares the Mahomet Aquifer to a bathtub full of sand — especially near Havana in Mason County where sand deposits are up to 100 feet deep.

During the flood of 1993, the aquifer actually overflowed, creating surface lakes and threatening businesses, railroads and roads on the southeast side of Havana.

In Mason County, the aquifer keeps ditches and streams flowing with clear, clean water that discharges into the Illinois River.

During dry stretches, up to 40 percent of the water in the river at Beardstown can be attributed to aquifers, says Clark. And plentiful and easily accessible ground water is what allows farmers to keep growing row crops like corn in the sandy soil year after year.

But like the seemingly inexhaustible Great Lakes, underground sources also have the potential to be overtaxed, creating hardship when wells have to be sunk deeper and deeper to reach the water table.

On average, about 200 million gallons a day is drawn from the Mahomet Aquifer by all users, according to the Illinois State Water Survey. The majority of that goes to agricultural uses, primarily irrigation in Mason and Tazewell counties, which use about 110 million gallons a day. The 550,000 residents in 150 communities use 60 million gallons a day; industry and commercial users draw about 30 million.

Not all aquifers are the same. Near Havana, water permeates about 90 feet of the sand deposit, leaving water within 10 feet of the surface in most instances.

But in other areas, the deposits may not be so deep and water so plentiful as in Mason County. Near Decatur, the aquifer

is capped by a layer of clay and recharges much more slowly. Where less water is stored, a new municipal well can lower the water table below wells drilled for residences or farming operations, requiring them to be deepened at considerable cost.

“We want to make sure that when we do something, there is a balance in the aquifer,” says Mel Pleines, chairman of the Mahomet Aquifer Consortium, an organization working to develop options for the region’s groundwater. “It’s more like a checkbook. We want to make sure there’s enough going back into it so the aquifer is there for the future.”

He says studies on the aquifer and its use will be completed by end of next year. “It’s not just one big pool under there. It’s deeper in some places than others.”

Increased use for irrigation, residential and municipal wells and other demands can strain the equilibrium that keeps wetlands and streams supplied with clean water, too.

Water quality also can be affected if the water table drops too low. Increased development that covers more and more land area with asphalt, concrete, homes and shopping areas prevents water from soaking in, and instead channels it directly into waterways to be carried off.

And while wetlands are not seen as a source of water, they play an important role in keeping the entire system healthy.

Illinois has lost 90 percent of its pre-settlement wetlands, most drained for farming or to build towns. About 1 million acres of wetlands remain.

People once saw wetlands as barriers to travel and places associated with diseases like malaria. Today, wetlands are viewed differently and are valued for their ability to store floodwater and because their plants can help absorb and disperse

pollutants and excess nutrients like nitrogen.

“Other than preserving green space and biodiversity, probably the most important thing wetlands do in the Chicago area is floodwater or storm water storage and retention,” says Allen Plocher, a wetlands scientist with the Illinois Natural History Survey in Champaign. “You could make the point that the larger the percentage of ground that is covered with concrete or asphalt, the more important wetlands become for groundwater recharge.

“It’s a real important role, and it’s real good water.”

Clark says wetlands play more of a role in floodwater storage than in groundwater recharge because many wetlands — especially those in areas with abundant groundwater — are fed by aquifers.

In Illinois, many marsh birds are state-listed as threatened or endangered because of reduced wetlands habitat.

O’Keefe says people become less resistant to the idea of implementing conservation measures once they become more knowledgeable about the issue.

Efforts to landscape with native plants, purchasing water-efficient appliances, tuning sprinklers to water grass and not pavement and being aware that the size of the house may dictate how much water is used all are pieces in a puzzle to be solved.

“I see a tremendous change in how people view this issue in the last seven or eight years,” she says. “A few years ago these ideas — like watering golf courses with waste water — were seen as kind of out there.”

Today, this state uses about 20 billion gallons of water each day, with that expected to increase by 28 percent by 2025, according to Southern Illinois University’s Department of Geography.

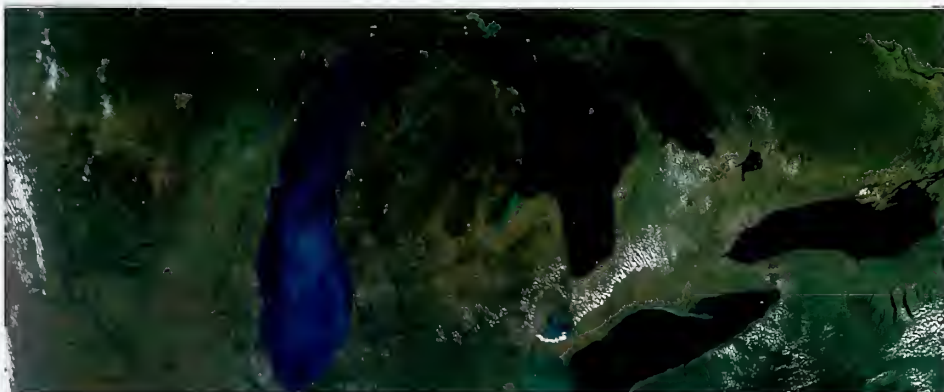
And there still are problems with development coming to places where water systems already are taxed, and the population continues to grow.

“It isn’t just in northeastern Illinois; there are predicted shortages elsewhere.”

O’Keefe says planning for the future is the best way to be sure Illinois’ water resources are well protected and cared for in the future. “I think the water issue is resonating with people.” □

*Chris Young is Outdoors editor for the Springfield State Journal-Register.*

*Image courtesy of NASA*





# Natural state

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Despite such environmental woes as a dwindling water supply, an ever-growing energy crisis and toxic workplaces, there are ways to find respite.

More than 475,000 acres of land are devoted to state parks and recreational sites managed by the Illinois

Department of Natural Resources. In the following pages, we highlight some of the offerings as visualized primarily by Adele Hodde, photographic services manager for Natural Resources.

Her photographs highlight such natural treasures as the lush Big River

State Forest, located northwest of Galesburg; the Cypress trees of the Cache River State Natural Area in southern Illinois; the wildflowers at the Jim Edgar Panther Creek State Fish and Wildlife Area in Cass County and the Adeline Jay Geo-Karis Illinois Beach State Park on Lake Michigan. □



*Jim Edgar Panther Creek Fish and Wildlife Area, a 16,551-acre site outside Chandlerville in Cass County*

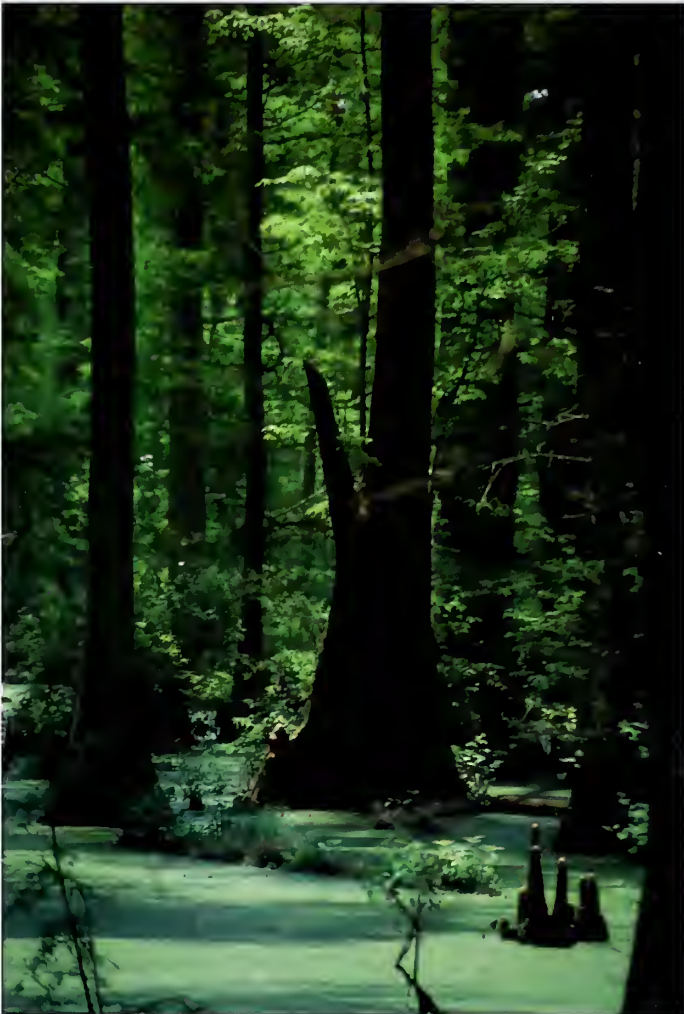




*Big River State Forest, 3,000 acres along the Mississippi River, northwest of Galesburg*



*Bluffs at Matthiessen State Park, near Utica in LaSalle County*



*Cache River State Natural Area's cypress trees in southern Illinois*



*Adeline Jay Geo-Karis Illinois Beach State Park stretches for 6.5 miles along Lake Michigan's shore.*





*Sand Ridge State Forest, 25 miles southwest of Peoria*



*Wildflowers at Adeline Jay Geo-Karis Illinois Beach State Park*



*The lake at Stephen A. Forbes State Recreation Area, northeast of Salem in Marion County*



# No child left inside

Children left to their own devices have the best chance  
to truly get to know nature

by James Krohe Jr.

Photographic illustrations by Kristy Hanlon

Saving the Earth — even that unprepossessing part of it we call Illinois — is usually pitched as something today's conscientious citizen does for the sake of the next generation. The problem is, the next generation doesn't seem to care. Environmental activists of a certain age have found that making Illinois greener is easy, compared with greening the hearts and minds of its children. With the whole world available to them on a screen, lots of kids know the Amazon rain forest better than they know their own backyards.

Children's lack of exposure to nature is crippling their spiritual, intellectual, emotional and physical development, according to child development experts, leaving too many of them soft of body and dull of mind. Public health officials see its effects in rising rates of hyperactivity disorders as well as obesity and related ills among the young. State parks administrators see slipping attendance and worry that it will get harder and harder to justify spending money to provide a public service to a public that no longer wants it. Green advocates worry that tomorrow's voters will be indifferent to public efforts to come to grips with climate change or species protection, or even paying for parks.



Happily, the cure for what ails 'em is close at hand — good old-fashioned outdoor play. Like a frail house plant that's been summered out on the patio, children who have communed with nature will return invigorated, even transformed — healthier, with outlooks both deeper and broader for their exposure to the wider world. Getting kids to do that is the mission of the "No Child Left Inside" coalition, named after a pioneering program with that aim devised by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection. A disparate array of organizations have hitched their horses to this bandwagon, from national do-gooder foundations to state and local government

agencies and advocacy organizations of greenish hue. Backers in Illinois include the Chicago Academy of Sciences' Notebaert Nature Museum and Chicago Wilderness, whose 220 allied green organizations support a Web site recommending various "Leave No Child Inside" activities.

The movement promises to do three things. One is to improve the health of kids. The second is to instill a love of nature in future voters and taxpayers and consumers. The third — less trumpeted, but still a powerful impetus to

movement-making — is to ensure the health of green organizations dependent on volunteers and donors.

But before we rush to put kids back into nature, we might ask whether we've put enough wisdom into the heads of adults.

*Nature outdoors is* a complex and ever-changing environment that strikes the alert child through all of the senses. Engaging it is the best kind of play — what the pediatricians call an "optimal developmental milieu." Of course, outdoor play of any kind is good for young bodies. Preschool children who play in natural environments with irregularly sloped



surfaces, to take one example, tend to be more coordinated than kids who played in traditional playgrounds that are designed, in effect, by liability lawyers.

At the heart of the movement — maybe we should say stomach — is concern about the spread of childhood obesity. Every No Child Left Inside program mentions it — not because nature play is a good thing for obesity but because promising to do something about obesity is a good thing for nature programs. As a cure for childhood obesity, nature isn't a very good one. For one thing, accumulating research strongly suggests that overeating is a much bigger causative factor than lack of exercise; a frolic along a creek bottom will only help if the child sees or smells something icky enough that it spoils his appetite.

Instilling a love of nature in future voters and taxpayers and consumers may prove difficult, too. Merely playing outdoors does not especially bend kids toward a lifelong commitment to things green, although it does seem to predispose them toward playing outdoors as adults in ways that are not fun for the planet — golf and off-road vehicles, for example, according to one 2002 study.

The need for a green citizenry is probably exaggerated anyway. The North American Association for the Advancement of Environmental Education might believe that coping with climate change, resource depletion and pollution will require that today's kids grow up with "the knowledge and skills necessary to address these complex issues," but the necessary knowledge and skills will more likely be found in a new generation of economics-lovers and engineering-lovers, not nature-lovers.

**Even if nature** immersion were the best means toward these worthy ends, No Child Left Inside advocates are left with the problem of how to do the immersing. Greens can sound like opera-lovers, certain that opera-haters could not help but fall in love with their favorite music if only they would try it.

Kate Millet, in a long report in *Chicago Wilderness* magazine, insists that kids "need good times in the outdoors to realize how wonderful it all is, to appreciate bees that live in the ground and caterpillars that drop from tree branches."



Having caterpillars drop onto one's head, or stirring up bee's nests while walking through a meadow in shorts can indeed be a transformative learning experience — one that will teach many kids to never again go near anything they can't make go away by flipping a switch.

The No Child Left Inside programs that are not silly tend to be earnestly instructional, based on the dubious assumption that to know nature is to love it. That approach may keep lots of environmental educators employed, but it risks turning nature into merely one more course in the crowded curriculum of improvement to which middle-class children are subjected. Not only is this unwelcome, at least by kids, it usually doesn't work. Knowledge is not the key to wonder — it's the other way around.

It doesn't help that so many of these activities assume that the most inter-

esting thing about the woods is the kid that's in them. At the Chicago Wilderness Web site, kids are urged to "pretend to be a tree." Such fatuous exercises turn kids' attention away from nature and back toward themselves. Anyway, if pretending is important, kids can pretend to be many more interesting things through their video games.

Kids know that. No kid ventures into a woods to learn. They go to reflect, to hide, to experiment — and to be amazed. Richard Louv summarized the research about the baleful effects of nature deprivation on the development of the young in his 2005 book, *Last Child in the Woods*. In a 2005 interview, Louv reminded us that nature appeals to the susceptible kid because "there are mysterious things that happen."

Too much instruction, or rather instruction too soon, destroys the mystery.



**Talk to committed** greens about their childhoods, and it is not visiting the nature center or the arboretum that they are likely to recall most fondly. Instead, they will bore you with rhapsodies about wandering creek bottoms near their houses, or puttering around the edges of ponds on vacation, or creating hide-aways in the bushes next to grandma's house.

Such places are more magical to the alert child than the mountain ranges or oceans they are obliged to be thrilled by on vacation, but the latter might be easier for many to visit. One of the big problems with getting kids out into nature is that less and less of Illinois' outdoors has any nature in it. Our parks are as sterile of nature as golf courses, which most of them are manicured to resemble, and residential subdivisions are developed with not a square meter of land with its profit potential unmaximized. Even if kids had parental leave to play in the dirt at home, dirt is hard to find, not only in urban neighborhoods but in most suburban ones, where the backyards are more about display than play.

The wiser parks and nature managers have tried to devise substitutes. The North Park Village Nature Center in Chicago offers an area where kids can walk off the trail and climb around on a fallen tree — the equivalent for today's cooped-up kids of a trek up the Zambezi. Encouraging — but kids still have to journey to the nature center to experience what they once might have found in their own neighborhoods.

Not only nature is missing in kids' environments. So is the freedom to explore the natural world. A widely quoted study from 1990 by the British contrarian social scientist Mayer Hillman found that the radius of play of the average 9-year-old has shrunk to one-ninth of what it was in 1970. As the director of the United Kingdom's Children's Play Council put it a few years ago, "For the first time in the four-million-year history of our species, we are effectively trapping children indoors at the very point when their bodies and minds are primed to start getting to grips with the world outside the home."

You have to look hard to find a No Child Left Inside program that even

acknowledges, much less addresses, this part of the problem. To his credit, Louv does. He notes that parental fear is probably the biggest obstacle between children and the outdoors. He lists among the bogeymen violent criminals, sexual predators, kidnappers and speeding cars — all but the last exaggerated if not wholly imagined. And let's not forget the filth that kids take outside with them. First there is sex; nature study is a good thing until Mom realizes that kids are exploring their own natures, too. Then there's violence; boys (mainly) will insist on playing war. And in the woods and under the bushes is a fine place to practice Daddy's naughty words.

There have been times in the past when Illinois parents were afraid to let their kids outside. As a boy in the '50s,



I was among millions who were warned off playing in puddles in the summer, lest pond scum give us polio. But never have so many parents seemed to be so afraid of so many things that are so unlikely to happen to their kids. Were one of today's newspaper cartoonists to introduce a character like Pigpen, one of Charles Schulz's Peanuts gang, it would not be a cloud of dust that follows him wherever he goes but a fog of antibacterial spray.

**One doesn't have** to read more than a few pages into any good child development text before being told that independent or unstructured play is the key to childhood nature experience. Alas, a typical kid encounters opportunities for such play about as often as he encounters a prairie white-fringed orchid. No Child programs are unlikely to increase them. Most are to be done in one's own backyard — bird feeders — or places that most kids under 16 can visit only with an adult available to drive them, such as large natural areas. Games and activities that are organized by adults according to adult notions of what is interesting to a kid — and which are consistent, of course, with whatever agenda the organizing body has in mind — take kids' attention away from nature and divert it to the activity.

Worse, No Child programs assume that kids will experience nature with an adult at least nearby, if not actually sharing that experience. Chicago Wilderness offers kids a list of "fun activities you can do together with your family." Such activities can be fun, but they can't be testing or enlarging or any of the other good things that can happen to kids confronting the larger world alone.

What Illinois needs now is not programs aimed at kids but at adults — adults who build and design cities, adults who run school systems, adults who raise kids. Such programs would promote safer and wilder neighborhoods. They would also encourage parents to teach kids not about nature but about cities, so kids can move safely about in them. None of those things will be expensive, but the effort will require changing a lot of people's attitudes toward public safety, land-use planning and urban aesthetics, and parenting — undertakings more complicated than building a backyard bird feeder.

And if we don't do those things? The next generation might indeed be less alert, less lively, less physically fit. They will however, be fit enough for the world that will be left for them to live in. □

*James Krohe Jr. is a frequent contributor to Illinois Issues and a veteran commentator on public policy issues.*

# Green houses

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Home buyers are driving a growing trend in the housing market for more environmentally friendly and energy-efficient construction

by Beverley Scobell

Steve Levinthal likes the idea of saving money on energy and doing his small part to reduce global warming. So when he built his new home in north suburban Glenview, he incorporated solar panels that will lower his utility bill and generate electricity to sell back to the power company. He uses geothermal and radiant heating systems and captures sunlight through skylights and well-placed windows for extra heat and light. Building green also meant choosing renewable woods such as bamboo for flooring and foam insulation made from recycled newspapers.

Levinthal also wanted a healthy home. Twice a cancer survivor, he chose products — paints, stains, adhesives — that were free of or had very low quantities of volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, that are known carcinogens. He added a “hospital-quality” air purification and humidity-controlled system to further make his inside environment green.

Levinthal is part of what Chicago real estate and columnist Mark Nash says is a growing trend in the housing market. “In” this year are buyers looking for a house, usually new, with a lower carbon footprint, a measurement of an individual’s carbon dioxide contribution to the atmosphere from daily activities such as heating and cooling a house, driving a car and producing, transporting and preparing food.

Nash says home buyers are looking for

energy-friendly mechanical systems and appliances as well as renewable and reused construction materials. He says they are also asking for homes that get at least some of their energy from sources that are “off the grid,” meaning the home generates power through solar, wind or geothermal technology separate from the utility company. “Home buyers are asking about how their new home can save the planet. It’s more than a trend; it’s a convenient truth.”

Nathan Kipnis designs houses for this mostly high-end market and says that as the cost of energy increases, going green and off-grid is going to become the norm.

“Like very quickly, as quickly as you’re seeing gas prices going up, you are going to very quickly see people freaking out and wanting to figure out how to generate power on their building,” says Kipnis, principal of Evanston-based Nathan Kipnis Architects Inc.

“Builders are responding to that market,” says Howard Learner, executive director of the Chicago-based Environmental Law and Policy Center. “We’re seeing a very different public consciousness — people who are looking to buy green, or greener. That’s a good trend, and that’s happening.”

With the right public policy, he says, Illinois can capitalize on this new mindset. “We are wonderfully positioned to seize the economic growth, job creation and environmental benefits of the growing green economy.”

Two bills in the General Assembly this

spring would amend the Energy Efficient Commercial Building Act to include single-family residential buildings under uniform energy efficiency standards. They contain similar language agreed to by homebuilders that would set minimum and maximum statewide standards for energy efficiency. **HB 1842**, sponsored by Evanston Democratic Rep. Julie Hamos, passed both chambers, and **SB 526**, sponsored by Chicago Democratic Sen. John Cullerton, awaits a concurrence vote when lawmakers return.

If adopted, Hamos says the code could save buyers of new homes at least 11 percent to 15 percent annually on utility bills. “If you make the investment in insulation and windows, you will achieve energy savings immediately, from Day 1 forward.”

The best and least expensive time to incorporate good insulation and windows, energy-efficient appliances and off-grid technologies such as solar or geothermal is in the design and construction of a new home, says Kipnis.

Says Learner, “If we build homes more energy efficient at the beginning, that can produce enormous utility bill savings for homeowners over time.”

Building green can cost 3 percent to 10 percent more. But some features of a green house, says Kipnis, cost no more than a conventional building. “Locating windows correctly doesn’t cost any money. Using low VOC paints, using bamboo flooring, using good, low-VOC adhesives, those all cost nothing.”

However, better insulation systems,



better mechanical systems and the “really esoteric stuff” — photovoltaic panels that generate power and the geothermal systems — “those begin to cost some significant money.”

At state and federal levels, most public policy for renewable- and efficient-energy programs that help with upfront costs is aimed at commercial and public buildings rather than residential, except for low-income individuals.

Levinthal believes that’s where he and others can make a difference. He points to the attractive feature of his solar roof panels, an advancement in technology that encourages its use in upscale neighborhoods. “They look like they’re part of the house. They look like they belong there, and that was one of the statements I was trying to make. I live in a reasonably affluent area where people can afford this kind of stuff, and if they go ahead and do it, they’re paving the way for other people. We can actually lower the cost so that the people who really need to save the money can do so.”

The housing market is still in a dive from the number of foreclosures after the collapse of the subprime loan industry. Housing starts hit a 17-year low in April, and the measure of homebuilders’ confidence fell again in May. Yet, market researchers project growth in commercial green building construction will lead to more residential adaptation. McGraw-Hill Construction Analytics estimates that the value of commercial construction starts for green building will grow from \$12 billion in 2008 to \$60 billion in 2010.

“The biggest incentive is that buyers, people who are purchasing homes, are increasingly looking for the homes to be greener,” says Learner.

Jonathan Feipel, deputy director overseeing the Bureau of Energy and Recycling in the state Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, says the renewable energy program that seems to make the most sense for residential customers and has been the most successful is the one for solar rebates.

“Looking at more bang for your buck, where the program has been more successful, has been on the solar side for residential.”

The department administers a solar



*The Levinthal house in Glenview has solar panels tied to the electricity grid, geothermal and zoned radiant heat, cement fiberboard siding, suntube daylighting skylights and bamboo flooring. Outside, landscaping includes permeable driveway pavers and mulch made from used tires.*

rebate program that picks up 30 percent of the cost of installing photovoltaic panels to generate electricity, up to a maximum of \$10,000. In fiscal year 2007, the department awarded 150 solar rebates and seven small wind energy grants, and in FY 2008 to the end of May, it had awarded 107 solar rebates.

Appropriations to the department to support residential green building statewide amount to about \$8 million a year. In addition to some dollars solicited from the federal Department of Energy, two funds make up the bulk of money available for programs. About \$5 million in the Renewable Energy Resources Trust Fund comes from all electric utility customers statewide through a charge on their bills. Money for the Energy Efficiency Trust Fund, about \$3 million, comes from electric company payments into the fund. Electric utilities and alternative retail electric suppliers contribute annually, based on the number of kilowatt-hours sold during the previous year.

Kipnis says that the state rebate check helps cover the upfront costs of a solar installation that generally pays a homeowner back in energy savings within five to six years.

Aur J. Beck, chief solar panel technician for Advanced Energy Solutions Group Inc., says the interest in solar energy is high in southern Illinois,

and many people use the rebates. In the nearly nine years he has been retrofitting homes with photovoltaic panels to generate electricity, his company’s sales have increased 30 percent to 40 percent per year. His own home in Pomona, a community in the Shawnee National Forest about 30 minutes southwest of Carbondale, is completely off-grid, which means he uses battery storage for excess generated electricity and is not connected to the power company’s lines.

Gerald “Butch” Dunn, who owns Ecologic Construction in Carbondale, does not advertise, he says, because he is a year behind in orders for new and retrofitted houses that incorporate environmentally friendly and energy-efficient materials into the design. He offers both passive solar — for example, dark stone floors that collect natural sunlight from strategically placed windows during the day and release the captured heat at night — and active solar from both thermal solar for water heaters and photovoltaic panels that generate power, taking some customers totally off the grid.

“Most people around here like the idea, especially now. In the last couple of years, attitudes have changed a lot. The power company has really been sticking it to us here lately, and fuel costs are going through the roof. It used to not make sense to go off the grid. It was cheaper to get your power from the



power company, but now it kind of balances out. It won't be too many more years before it makes no sense to not go off the grid."

However, he says some of his customers are still afraid to invest in technology to go off-grid, though in some cases the upfront costs would be equivalent to running a power line from the nearest neighbor. Also, he says, information about state rebates for solar installation is not readily available. "A lot of people know there's something out there, but they don't know how to do it. They don't know how to make the system work."

Net metering, which was signed into law last summer and became effective in April, requires investor-owned utilities, primarily Commonwealth Edison and Ameren Illinois, to provide meters that record electricity produced by residents through renewable energy sources — wind, solar, anaerobic digestion of livestock or food processing waste, hydropower, and fuel cells and micro-turbines powered by renewable fuels — and compensate them for any power returned to the grid.

Ameren Corp. spokesman Leigh Morris says the company, as with Commonwealth Edison, offered net metering prior to the April deadline. He says most Ameren customers use it for wind generation, but it is available for all renewable sources, and the company "welcomes inquiries about the service."

Dunn says from his perspective Ameren has been slow to make it available in southern Illinois. "It's unfortunate. If we do go to net metering, and they give you a fair price for the power you produce, then it makes sense."

Levinthal has a similar story with Commonwealth Edison. He says it took seven months to get the right meter to measure the electricity he was producing and in mid-May it still was not registering correctly. "It is very difficult to get the utilities to work with you on this," he says. However, he is not ready to lay the entire blame on the utility. "When you're doing cutting-edge stuff, it takes a while to figure out everything that you're doing."

State Sen. Bill Brady, a Republican from Bloomington, was an early sponsor of net metering. A central Illinois homebuilder by trade, Brady says some homeowners he

serves have incorporated geothermal options into their plans, but so far he is not seeing an increased demand for green products in central Illinois. He says part of that comes down to public education.

"Incorporating green standards — where financially they make sense — into the mix is good," says Brady. "I think we have to be very cautious not to overmandate things. They increase the cost of housing so much because they sound good rather than have real application."

However, architect Kipnis believes many new and rehabbed buildings are going to be built as net producers of energy. "On an annual basis, they will produce more power than they use," he says. "Realistically, we're going to see buildings get closer and closer to being 100 percent of their power — not necessarily their total energy, but their electric

*Photograph courtesy of JB Spector, Museum of Science and Industry*



*This three-story, 2,500-square-foot modular house sits in a park on the grounds of the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago. It includes a green-roof garden as well as photovoltaic film, which harvests daylight and provides much of the home's electrical energy. Among its "Green + Wired" technology is a home-automation system that controls heat, lighting and window coverings to reduce energy consumption.*

power — with solar, as the price of electricity goes up and as the price of the PV panels comes down. And any government help in between to bridge the gap will be great."

Help from government may be slower in coming. A bill (**HR 6049**) that passed out of the U.S. House of Representatives in May would extend through 2014 the 30 percent investment tax credit for solar energy property and qualified fuel cell property, and the 10 percent investment tax credit for microturbines. Biomass, geothermal, landfill gas and other technologies receive a three-year extension under the legislation. The \$54 billion package would extend the federal production tax credit for wind power only through December 31, 2009, but it does contain a new small-wind investment tax credit, which is technology that could be applied to homes.

However, the legislation failed to pass in the U.S. Senate by mid-June. Congress has been trying unsuccessfully for a year to extend tax credits for individuals, businesses and developers who invest in clean power. When the credits expire at the end of this year, some economists estimate that more than 100,000 jobs and close to \$20 billion in investment will disappear.

In Illinois, Comptroller Dan Hynes' office reports that about \$20 million is available in the Renewable Energy Trust Fund but that the state Senate in May voted to return authority to Gov. Rod Blagojevich to use money in dedicated funds to fill budget holes. Hamos says that, as of the end of May, the House had not authorized a fund sweep.

"They're still vulnerable," she says. "The money sitting in those funds is sort of like a sitting duck." The state doesn't have new revenues coming in, and those it depends upon are affected by the economy. "As a result of that, we do not have the revenues to support all of our big dreams."

Still, environmentalists and builders agree that what is needed to spur more green construction — multiplying the environmental and job creation benefits that come with it — is public policy.

"Illinois is positioned and poised to be leaders in the growing market for solar energy equipment and installation," says Learner. "We really need to focus and move forward if we want to seize the jobs of the future in the growing green economy." □



# Fresh air

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Air quality isn't just for outdoors. Homeowners and building managers also are turning their attention to indoor environments even before mandates kick in

by Bethany Jaeger

State Sen. Mattie Hunter says she used to leave her home in Chicago feeling perfectly fine. But as soon as she walked off the elevator on the way to her office in the Capitol in Springfield, her nose would run. The headaches would start.

"The pounding headaches, you know?" she says. "And it never happened until I got into this building on this floor."

She says she has asthma, sinusitis and a mold allergy, so she felt particularly sensitive to the air quality. She wanted to know whether the sixth-floor office space was making her sicker.

Mold was a problem, primarily resulting from a lack of air circulation, says Cindy Davidsmeyer, spokeswoman for Senate President Emil Jones. So the state hired a Decatur firm, T. A. Brinkoetter & Sons, to install equipment on the roof of the Capitol above the affected offices, improving air circulation.

Hunter says things are better. "But there's still some work that has to be done. I think this is a sick building. I really feel that way."

She refers to "sick building syndrome," which encompasses just about everything from mold growth to chemical contamination. It can have numerous implications, but the catch-all diagnosis makes it difficult to regulate, says Brian Urbaszewski, director of environmental health programs for the Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago. The usual suspects include mold, radon, tobacco smoke and ozone, as well as fumes from carpets or common chemical products.

While public and private building

managers follow numerous standards for indoor air quality, they're rarely bound by mandates. Illinois does ban smoking in public places, and carbon monoxide detectors must be installed in most homes and apartments. Countless building codes also spell out directions for construction managers, but no government agency truly mandates the daily monitoring of indoor air quality. They rely on guidelines to determine the amount of fresh air needed based on the number of people in an area.

Even without requirements, homeowners increasingly are finding out about recommendations to test for radon. Home builders, however, say under no circumstances would they support a mandate to test because not every home has radon, and it would increase the cost of building a new house, says J. Mark Harris, executive vice president of the Home Builders Association of Illinois, based in Springfield.

Among state and corporate buildings, managers also are more often following voluntary standards. The growing demand for "green" building or construction has made such guidelines for energy efficiency a norm, but as homes and buildings become more efficient and airtight, industry organizations are writing more standards to ensure they are clear of indoor air pollutants.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says a growing body of evidence shows "air within homes and other buildings can be more seriously polluted than the outdoor air in even the largest and most industrialized cities." And because

people spend an estimated 90 percent of their time indoors, individuals could have a greater risk of exposure to pollutants inside their homes than they do outside.

The EPA warns, however, that officials have limited understanding of indoor pollutants and their health effects. Not only are they unable to determine the levels that trigger health reactions, but they can't control that some people are far more sensitive than others.

What's clear is that without proper ventilation, gases, chemicals and other potential hazards can accumulate and make some people sick.

Radon, for instance, is the second leading cause of lung cancer overall, but it's also the leading cause of lung cancer among nonsmokers.

Radon is a naturally occurring, radioactive gas produced when uranium decays in the soil or building materials. It's odorless and colorless, so unlike carbon monoxide, radon doesn't cause immediate reactions of headaches or dizziness. As a result, homeowners can be exposed to high concentrations before realizing a problem, according to the Illinois Department of Emergency Management Agency's Division of Nuclear Safety.

Although radon contamination can easily be detected and resolved, the state does not mandate homeowners to test for it.

State legislators also aren't ready to mandate all newly constructed homes to include radon mitigation systems — the General Assembly rejected that idea in the spring.

Home builders say that adds unnecessary costs and isn't justified across the board for all new homes.

"It should be a consumer's choice," Harris says. "It shouldn't be mandated that every house be tested for radon because not every house has radon. If that's the case, then check all houses — existing, not just new construction."

The state Emergency Management Agency says mitigations can cost anywhere from \$800 to more than \$1,000, depending on the type of system installed and the characteristics of the house.

State government did enact a law last year requiring all real estate transactions to include contracts of sorts with the basic information about the importance of testing for radon. Buyers have to sign the paper to prove they were informed.

Neither lawmakers nor industry professionals are ready for a mandate, according to Patrick Daniels, health physicist for the state Emergency Management Agency, which licenses such professionals. Requiring testing actually could make situations worse because there wouldn't be enough licensed professionals to test every home or to mitigate homes with unacceptable levels.

"You would actually slow down real estate transactions," he says.

or correct the problems, regulations may not be necessary.

In the case of radon, a 2006 report caught media attention and fueled a public awareness campaign that nearly half the homes in Illinois could have a radon problem. Of 22,000 measurements the state agency took in 2003 and 2004, 46 percent of homes had radon concentration levels exceeding the national standard of 4 picocuries per liter. The risk of developing lung cancer at that level in nonsmokers increases to about seven lung cancer deaths per 1,000 individuals. With minimal traces of radon, nonsmokers' cancer risk is about one person per 1,000, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Daniels, who oversees the state's radon program, says the department distributed about 6,000 free test kits to homeowners in 2006. So far this year, he says the agency has given out about 30,000.

"Your greatest risk in your home is exposure to radon, and the only way to know if you have a problem is to test," he says. In fact, a 1996 report by the Harvard Center for Risk Analysis rates radon as the No. 1 risk for premature death in homes, outranking accidental shootings, which is sixth, and smoking tobacco products, seventh.

*As homes become* more airtight and energy efficient, the likelihood of trapping indoor air pollutants in living spaces increases. Such buildings as retail stores and schools, on the other hand, typically have heating and air conditioning systems designed to push air outside, preventing such gases as radon from accumulating, Daniels says.

But whether buildings are public or private, residential or commercial, their air quality largely depends on the heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems, which Raj Gupta, president of Environmental Systems Design Inc. in Chicago, describes as the "lungs of the building." The firm provides consulting engineering services in 15 states and seven countries and belongs to the Building Owners and Managers Association of Chicago.

Gupta says it would be a mistake for any level of government to mandate such building aspects as energy supply or air quality controls. Instead, the private sector prefers that the government only prescribe a target.

"Give us the standard, give us the goal, but then let us figure out the best way to put these systems together to meet the goal," he says.

The codes for air quality widely used by all levels of governments often come from such organizations as the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers, an international nonprofit organization based in Atlanta.

And more often, public and private building managers are seeking certification by such rating systems as the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program. It uses a points-based system to certify new construction and renovation projects, and it has an entire section for ensuring indoor air quality.

Project managers earn points, for instance, by monitoring air delivery systems to ensure the building has a good mix of outdoor air with re-circulated air, says Doug Widener, executive director of the U.S. Green Building Council Chicago Chapter. That mix helps flush out contaminants and provides better-quality air for the workplace.

He says more private-sector businesses are becoming "green" buildings, partially because they save money by using fewer resources and because they often obtain governmental aid for the projects.

"The dollar speaks louder than the requirements if you tie it to enough financial incentives," Widener says.

But another perk, he adds, is that 70 percent of the savings comes from "human factors," or increased productivity, less turnover, better employee satisfaction.

"That's all linked to the idea that if you build a building that is more comfortable to live and work in, people are going to be happier and more productive. It makes sense because one of the biggest things besides energy use for most corporations is personnel or human resources — paying people and insurance."

So far, the public sector has been at the forefront of using Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design standards for new buildings and renovation projects. In Illinois, the Capital Development Board pursues LEED certification for all projects larger than 10,000 square feet. Smaller projects are still designed to meet a certain level of LEED standards, but the state doesn't pursue the actual certification,

Photograph courtesy of the Illinois Emergency Management Agency



*Radon mitigation systems are installed in homes that are tested and found to have levels exceeding the national standard, 4 picocuries per liter, which can increase lung cancer risk. Neither the state nor the federal government requires testing or mitigation.*

The public and private sector managers agree: If public awareness continues to build and more individuals act to prevent





*The Illinois House chamber uses a ventilation system that circulates air from columns in the chamber to the attic, where the air is filtered and dispersed over the lawmakers' desks.*

says Lisa Mattingly, deputy director of professional services for the board.

Other standards include a rating system by the National Association of Home Builders Green Building Program.

Project managers often pursue such certification to meet demand for energy efficient homes. Projects often include upgraded heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems that improve air quality.

In the state Capitol, the HVAC system was upgraded to achieve a 95 percent filtration rate, according to Paul Boland, a mechanical engineer and vice president of Henneman Engineering Inc. in Champaign. That far exceeds the 30 percent filtration typically included in commercial buildings.

Such an advanced system was needed because the Capitol also serves as a museum-like environment to preserve historical murals and other artifacts, Boland says, but prior to the HVAC renovation, the Statehouse did not have adequate amounts of outside air introduced into the building. Now most rooms meet the commonly used standard for the level of airflow required per person.

"Before, on a day like today, when it's 90 degrees and 70 percent humidity, it would just be a sweatshop in those areas," he said of the Capitol rotunda and public corridors. "Now, even with an occupant load of 3,000 for a demonstration, it's very cool, and you can feel some air movement. People are very much more comfortable."

While state and local governments continue to enact stricter building codes, Illinois legislators also rejected an idea to require all new state facilities to meet LEED standards. Legislation would have

codified recommendations of the statutory Green Building Advisory Committee that already guides most state projects. It won House approval but stalled in the Senate.

Even without mandates, the public sector continues to raise the bar, says Gupta of Environmental Systems Design Inc. That, in turn, raises the standards for the private sector.

It took awhile for the private sector to catch on, he adds, but now manufacturers and building code officials are joining what he describes as a movement. It's getting easier and more cost-effective to comply, he says. Rather than a one-size-

fits-all program, different standards apply to such areas as indoor air quality for new construction or renovations of, say, aging schools or homes.

More businesses are looking to renovate existing buildings to save on the cost of materials. And coupled with energy trends and consumer demand for LEED certified energy efficiency and air quality, Gupta says, "it's not that much of a hurdle to meet the energy code. I wouldn't even say it's a hurdle. It's just something that we do."

Ensuring that homeowners and workers breathe fresh air could become part of that movement as a result. □

## **Purifying the air isn't as easy as flipping a switch**

Some homeowners use air purifiers to improve the quality of air, yet they're not regulated by any federal agencies. And they vary in effectiveness, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Ozone, for instance, is produced when vehicle emissions combine with sunlight. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency uses the phrase "good up high, bad nearby" to describe how ozone protects the Earth when it's high in the atmosphere, but it burns the inside of lungs when it's at the ground level.

"It's like a sunburn on the inside," says Brian Urbaszewski, director of environmental health programs for the Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago.

Ozone is particularly harmful for people with asthma or chronic lung conditions, but even at relatively low levels, ozone can cause chest pain, coughing, shortness of breath and throat irritation in people without those conditions.

Not only can ozone seep into indoor spaces — including when a school bus is parked outside of a classroom — but it also is produced by some of the very products designed to clear the air of pollutants.

Consumer Reports Web site, published by the nonprofit, independent Consumers Union, says people spend \$350 million a year on air purifiers; yet, there's little medical evidence that they reduce the effects of pollutants for people with asthma and allergies.

Some machines are designed to generate ozone as a way to trap some pollutants, and they make dust stick to other items in the room so they don't float freely in the air. Manufacturers say they transform toxic particles into harmless ones if used correctly, depending on whether people occupy the room.

The U.S. EPA has not approved such ozone generators for occupied spaces. Rather than regulate the air purifiers, however, numerous federal agencies are embarking on a campaign to educate the public.

Urbaszewski says consumers still have few guidelines from officials.

"It's buyer beware. There are some things out there that could actually hurt you that nobody in government is regulating them or telling you what's bad or worse."

Studies show that ozone generators can actually cause the organic chemicals to react to each other and form harmful or irritating byproducts. Studies also show they're ineffective at removing such common allergens as dust and pollen, and they don't remove viruses, bacteria or molds. Effectiveness, however, varies among all air purifiers on the market.

It's up to homeowners to diagnose and treat the root of the poor air quality, Urbaszewski says.

"Duh, you have to get rid of the old nasty carpet. The dog may need to live elsewhere if the child has severe asthma. You have to mop your floors to keep dust levels down. Smoke outside. Try to quit," he says. "It's like putting a Band-Aid on an amputation if you're trying to use one of these filters to clean up a mess without addressing the underlying cause. It's not a magical cure-all."

Bethany Jaeger



# A lot on its plate

Ethanol is being served a heaping portion of blame in the debate over rising food prices and world hunger

by Pat Guinane

**F**ood riots in Haiti. Bread rationing in Egypt. Armed farmers guarding rice fields against thieves in Thailand.

Hunger is tightening its global grip amid soaring grain prices. And the troubling outlook for what is being called a burgeoning food crisis has cast a menacing glare on our nation's thirst for farm-fed biofuels.

A hungry world watches as the United States burns a quarter of its corn crop for automotive fuel. To some, the connection between ethanol and hunger is as incriminating as Nero's legendary fiddling.

"Over the last several months, we've seen world food prices skyrocket, with wheat and corn more than doubling, rice tripling. What that means for people in developing countries is they're having a hard time securing enough food to feed their families," says Janet Larsen, director of research for the Earth Policy Institute, an environmental think tank based in Washington, D.C. "In seven of the last eight years, the world has consumed more grain than we've produced. It's put us in a very tight position, and then we have just over the last couple years a new major demand on our food supply, and that is turning corn in the United States to ethanol."

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, which convened a major summit last month in Rome, says the near doubling of world grain prices over the past year has swelled the ranks of the 800 million world citizens grappling with chronic hunger. Meanwhile, the U.S. ethanol industry, already buffeted by

domestic critics, urged world leaders to eschew easy indictments.

"It is unfortunate that preliminary statements from some world leaders and institutions seek to blame the world biofuels industry more than any other factor. This misguided assault will do little to bring the kind of food security required by millions of people around the world," Renewable Fuels Association President Bob Dinneen declared as the U.N. food talks began June 3. "Efforts to demonize biofuels will distract from the real issues that have pushed far too many people into hunger. Failures by nations and international organizations to address the ever-increasing demand for ever-depleting oil reserves or encourage increased agricultural productivity and efficiencies have set the stage for the food crisis in which we find ourselves."

Spurred by federal subsidies and

production quotas, the United States has been home to an ethanol explosion. The number of biorefineries churning out the farmer-friendly gasoline alternative has more than doubled the past five years to roughly 150 plants. The industry, which assigns most of the blame for rising food costs to skyrocketing oil prices, expects domestic ethanol production to grow roughly 39 percent this year, to meet a federal mandate of 9 billion gallons. The ethanol boom has coincided with record crude oil prices and helped fuel unprecedented corn values, epitomizing what some consider an emerging market force.

"We are entering a new era in which agricultural commodity prices are tied to crude oil prices," Purdue University agricultural economists Wallace Tyner and Farzad Taheripour conclude in a policy paper presented earlier this year. They

*Photograph by Dani Simmonds, courtesy of Morguefile.com*





suggest present ethanol production could double, to nearly 18 billion gallons annually, if oil prices remain above \$120 a barrel. With crude hovering at such a precipitous mark, the researchers assert, ethanol production remains profitable until corn prices top \$6.80 a bushel. The breakeven point would drop to \$5.20 a bushel if Congress did away with a 51-cents-per-gallon subsidy for ethanol blenders. Ethanol profits evaporate as corn prices rise, leading industry analysts to predict the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will have to relax this year's production mandate of 9 billion gallons. The so-called Renewable Fuels Standard might have been reduced already were oil prices not flirting with the \$140 mark.

"When the price of oil goes up, it makes it ever so much more profitable to turn our food into oil substitutes," says Larsen, the Earth Policy Institute researcher. "So it's possible that the effect is even more pervasive, in that the rising price of oil is moving grain prices closer to their oil equivalent value."

At the Chicago Board of Trade in mid-June, corn futures vaulted above \$7 a bushel, or more than triple that of two years ago. And those already record prices could soar past \$8.50 if the nation sees a severe drought like the one that devastated corn yields two decades ago, researchers at Iowa State University's Center for Agricultural and Rural Development cautioned this spring. That was before torrential rains and record flooding pummeled the Midwest last month, leading the U.S. Department of Agriculture to lower this year's corn production forecast to 10 percent below last year's crop.

Even before those devastating storms, rising corn prices had sparked an ethanol backlash, with influential Washington lobbies such as the National Chicken Council and the Grocery Manufacturers Association launching campaigns to curtail biofuel production subsidies. And the farm bill that President George W. Bush vetoed in May threatened to reduce the federal tax break for ethanol blenders by nearly 12 percent, to 45 cents a gallon.

But the ethanol industry, which is fighting back with a media campaign that could be heard on Chicago radio, says its escalating corn consumption isn't taking food out of anyone's mouth. The Renewable Fuels Association and other

ethanol advocates point to USDA research that suggests the ripples caused by rising commodity prices barely shake supermarket shelves. When corn jumped from under \$2 a bushel in 2005 to \$3.40 last year, the increase raised the cost of a box of corn flakes by less than 2 cents, says USDA economist Ephraim Leibtag. Ditto

*Photograph by Mary K. Baird, courtesy of Morguefile.com*



for a two-liter bottle of soda pop sweetened by high-fructose corn syrup.

"In part, people are looking for a convenient scapegoat on which to shift all the blame and disguise the real issues that are at play," says Renewable Fuels Association spokesman Matt Hartwig. "Skyrocketing oil prices, surging demand, a weak dollar, droughts, wild speculation and failed agricultural policies across the world all play a far more significant role in rising food prices than does biofuels."

But the other side argues that ethanol has contributed to world hunger by playing a role in the soaring price of not only corn but also rice and wheat. Mark Rosegrant of the International Food Policy Research Institute says producers, including rice farmers in Asia and Latin America, are planting less of those diet staples to make room for a more profitable corn crop. "These indirect demand-and-supply side effects on other crops then have also caused biofuels production to boost the price of rice and wheat and other crops," Rosegrant told a U.S. Senate panel in May. The biofuel boom is responsible for more than 20 percent of the price increases for wheat and rice seen since 2000, says Rosegrant, the director of environment and production technology research for the institute, which is devoted to ending hunger and poverty.

The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization says world food prices rose 40 percent in 2007 and have made similar gains so far this year, sparking riots in Cameroon, Egypt, Haiti, Indonesia, Somalia and other developing nations. More than three dozen countries are on the front lines of a food crisis.

"Riots in over 30 countries, 30 million Africans who will likely fall into poverty, 100 million people worldwide who are at risk, 850 million people who are malnourished; 2 billion people who are struggling every day to put food on the table. If we cannot act now, when?" World Bank Group president Robert Zoellick asked at the U.N. summit in Rome. "This is not a natural catastrophe. It is man-made and can be fixed by us. It does not take complex research. We know what has to be done."

Zoellick called for easing biofuel production subsidies. But it was just one aspect of a proposed game plan that included lifting food export bans across the globe, investing in agricultural research and, more immediately, ensuring that small farmers in developing nations have access to seed and fertilizer.

The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization asked world leaders to commit \$30 billion a year to "relaunch agriculture." The organization acknowledges that biofuels are only one trigger to a complex crisis also driven by rising energy costs, crop-wilting weather events and an influx of financial speculators drawn to the commodities market by instability on Wall Street.

So if ethanol's appetite for crops is only one factor behind rising food prices, why does the biofuel attract so much blame? The alternative fuel's relationship with oil — and rising petroleum prices — appears to spark some guilt by association. But Art Bunting, president of the Illinois Corn Growers Association, says the oil price pinch means that, despite record corn values, farmers aren't getting fat. To him the ethanol backlash is like cursing a kid brother for mischief wrought by a more mature sibling.

"Ethanol is just an easy target," says Bunting, who farms about 2,000 acres south of Dwight. "They can't fight big oil or the real reason: high prices of fuel and energy. So they're going after ethanol." □

*Pat Guinane is Statehouse bureau chief for the The Times of Northwest Indiana. Previously, he was Statehouse bureau chief for Illinois Issues.*

## Purchasing power

**Mark Pruitt**, so far, is an agency of one. He was appointed executive director of the Illinois Power Agency created last spring. He and his future staff are charged with carrying out state law that drastically changes the way Illinois electricity customers will get power.

"A lot of what has to happen here is education-based," he says. "A lot of consumers just don't think about this until the bill shows up. They flip the switch, and a light comes on."

When costs increase, as they did as much as 300 percent in some downstate communities last year, he says the agency will have to explain, "This is where the price comes from and why."

The General Assembly created the agency after a 1997 state law expired and deregulated the industry.

When legislators rewrote the law in 2007, they determined the agency must ensure adequate, reliable, affordable and environmentally sustainable electricity at the lowest price over time.

While previous public bodies also maintained that goal, the Illinois Power Agency embarks on new territory. It will buy power on behalf of utilities and eventually could generate its own power, sparking controversy about whether the state should compete with other suppliers.

Pruitt will not write policies or regulate the industry.

"My job is to take that policy and make sure I understand its intent," he says. "I need to make sure I understand exactly what it is they want, why they want it, and then I go out and put together a structure that yields what they want."

By mid-August, he must develop and submit a "procurement plan" to the Illinois Commerce Commission for review by the five-member panel, the public and the power industry. His plan could propose where the state obtains the power and how it's transmitted to utilities, which then would distribute the electricity to customers.

The two utilities that serve most Illinois customers, Commonwealth Edison in the northern part of the state and Ameren Illinois south of Interstate 80, recently

sought approval from the Illinois Commerce Commission to increase delivery rates to cover rising costs.

While the commission will continue to oversee the rate-setting process for utilities, the Illinois Power Agency will have to monitor how wholesale market prices drive retail prices.

"The cost of energy changes hour by hour, minute by minute," Pruitt says. "So when we go out and procure, what we're trying to do is to say: 'We expect to use this much energy. Let's go ahead and buy as close to that much energy as possible.'"

But he also has to hedge against the risk that customers could demand more energy than the amount procured, which would be addressed in the contracts obtained by the agency.

Until he can hire someone to oversee the procurement process, however, Pruitt

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***A lot of consumers just don't think about this until the bill shows up. They flip the switch, and a light comes on.***

will draw on his own background to fulfill that function.

Most recently, he worked for the Energy Resources Center at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He clustered energy supply contracts for such facilities as state offices, prisons and mental health centers.

He previously worked at Nicor Inc., based in Naperville, helping such clients as local hospitals develop their own power plants. He also developed energy efficiency programs for Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory in Batavia.

At Bradley University in Peoria, he majored in political science and secondary education, with a minor in economics and sociology. He also nearly completed enough courses for a history minor, with ambitions to be a civics teacher.

He now lives in the Bridgeport neighborhood of Chicago. While his office is based in the city, he often will travel to Springfield to meet with legislators, utilities and other industry insiders.

*Bethany Jaeger*

## High honors

Starting in September, Illinois Supreme Court Justice **Thomas Fitzgerald** will serve the next three years as top judge, when the three-year term of current Chief Justice **Robert Thomas** expires.

Fitzgerald, a Chicago native, was elected to the Supreme Court in 2000, shortly before the court revamped the system for hearing death penalty cases. Fitzgerald orchestrated that effort as chairperson of the court's special committee for revising rules for administering capital cases. Those included requiring all attorneys in death penalty cases to become certified in trying such cases.

Last year, Fitzgerald also initiated an effort among public and private agencies to train lawyers in providing free legal services to Illinois veterans.

Fitzgerald's appointment as chief justice caps a more than 30-year career, which includes serving as presiding judge of Illinois' first statewide grand jury.

He attended Loyola University in Chicago and then served in the U.S. Navy before graduating from the John Marshall Law School, where he founded the school's law review.

Fitzgerald started his career as a prosecutor in the Cook County state's attorney's office and was elected circuit court judge in Cook County in 1976. He also served in Cook County criminal court and traffic court.

He taught at the John Marshall Law School and Chicago-Kent College of Law, as well as at the Einstein Institute for Science, Health and the Courts in Washington, D.C.

During Thomas' three years as chief judge, he oversaw the use of technology to open the courtroom to the public through the Internet. Oral arguments before the court can be heard and seen on the court's Web site shortly after they are heard in the courtroom.



## Shifts at the top

• Gov. Rod Blagojevich's office has a new deputy governor and a new spokesman. **Bob Greenlee** replaces **Sheila Nix** as deputy governor. Based in Chicago, Greenlee will work directly with the governor to develop and implement his agenda, and he will oversee the policy staff and the legislative affairs team.

He previously served as one of the administration's deputy chiefs of staff and as deputy director of the governor's Office of Management and Budget.

After graduating from Yale University in New Haven, Conn., and earning his law degree from the University of Chicago Law School, Greenlee worked as a private practice lawyer before joining state government.

Nix, who resigned in mid-June, served in her deputy governor's role from a Chicago office since late 2006. She had been the governor's senior adviser since 2004. She led efforts to require Illinois pharmacists to fill emergency contraception prescriptions regardless of religious beliefs. She also developed a plan to grant free public transportation rides to seniors. In a news release, the governor described Nix as "one of the most dedicated and capable people I know."

Deputy Gov. Louanner Peters, based in Springfield, continues to serve.

• **Brian Williamsen** replaces **Rebecca Rausch** as Blagojevich's Springfield-based spokesperson. Rausch now works with Fleishman-Hillard, a public relations firm in St. Louis. She previously was a reporter for WICS-TV in Springfield.

Williamsen, who lives in Pekin, was spokesman for the Illinois Department of Transportation since September 2007. He started working in government public relations in 2006 as a public information officer for the City of North Myrtle Beach, S.C.

Prior to that, he also was a reporter and news anchor for WPDE-TV in Myrtle Beach. He started his journalism career at Springfield's WICS-TV. He graduated from Bradley University in Peoria.

• **Terry Mutchler** moved on from the Illinois attorney general's Division of Public Access and Opinions, where she educated governments, reporters and members of the public about using and abiding by the Freedom of Information Act and the Open Meetings Act. She is

now serving in a similar role for the Pennsylvania governor's office.

• **Frank Bello** was appointed chief investment officer of the *College Illinois!* prepaid college tuition program administered by the Illinois Student Assistance Commission. He arrives from Chicago, where he served as deputy city treasurer. He has 20 years of finance experience in the public and private sectors. He earned his master of business administration from the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago and a bachelor's in accounting from the University of Illinois at Chicago.

## Time for a new game

State Rep. **Bob Molaro**, a Chicago Democrat, is stepping down, as the Democratic Party considers his replacement on the November ballot.

Molaro has represented the southwest side of the city for 17 years, including seven in the House and 10 in the Senate. He served as a key negotiator on gaming issues, which are expected to remain in the spotlight as legislators debate the possibility of expanding gambling to help pay for a statewide infrastructure plan.

Molaro says he planned to retire anyway, but the Democratic infighting in Springfield didn't help.

"The circus itself, I'm getting tired of. I'm going to miss all the clowns, that's for sure."

He says he's considering private law practice or other government work, including a vacant judicial seat in Chicago.

## OBITS



*Durward Long*

### Durward Long

The third president of then-Sangamon State University, who helped found what is now the Center for State Policy and Leadership in 1989, died Saturday, May 31. He was 77.

Barbara Ferrara, associate director of the center at what is now the University of Illinois at Springfield, says Long's vision for the school helped elevate its standards.

The center was formerly known as the

Institute for Public Affairs, a coordination of the campus-based public radio station, television outlet and *Illinois Issues*, as well as research and survey units studying public policy.

Long's work in establishing the institute made UIS the envy of public policy groups across the country for its synergy of programs.

While Long was president of the university from 1984 to 1990, enrollment increased to more than 4,000 students for the first time.

He then became vice chancellor for strategic planning before being named professor emeritus of economic history and African-American history.

He received his bachelor's from Troy State University in Alabama, master's at Auburn University in Alabama and his doctorate from the University of Florida in Gainesville.

## Walter Netsch

The prominent Chicago architect, known for his work at the University of Illinois at Chicago campus, the United States Air Force Academy and other institutions throughout the nation, died June 15. He was 88.

Netsch's complex designs were sometimes controversial, departing from the boxy orthodoxy of the 1950s and 1960s. He was hailed, however, as a mentor to architects who followed him and often honored by his peers.

"He was one of those creative figures of the 1960s who broke the mold and paved the way for a younger generation to follow," John Zukowsky, chief curator of the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum in New York City, told the *Chicago Tribune*.

Among Netsch's best-known designs is the spiky Cadet Chapel at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, which the American Institute of Architects named as the 51st most popular building in the country in 2007. Many other designs stand at universities in the Chicago area and other institutions across America.

Netsch was the husband of **Dawn Clark Netsch**, former Democratic state comptroller and legislator and that party's nominee for governor in 1994.

He graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1943.

## Clarifying graduation rates for online school

The May 2008 "Virtual degrees" article that ran in *Illinois Issues* magazine (see *Illinois Issues*, May, page 26) provided insight into the increasingly important role that online degrees are playing in higher education today. However, I'd like to correct the graduation rates for University of Phoenix.

The federal government's system for collecting and reporting graduation rates tracks only those students who enter an institution with zero college credits. Given the nontraditional students served by University of Phoenix — working adults, single parents and first generation college students — 93 percent of our students enroll with existing college credits and therefore are excluded by the government's database.

When our entire student population is taken into account, University of Phoenix's average graduation rate is 40 percent to 60 percent — equal to that

found among traditional four-year colleges and universities. Our graduation rates have been validated by numerous accrediting bodies and by state boards of higher education in the 39 states in which we operate physical campuses.

If we are to have accountability and benchmarks for higher education, let's ensure they are accurate and all-inclusive. Measurement systems that disqualify nontraditional or working class students, who make up more than 70 percent of undergraduates today, are discriminatory.

I appreciate the forum to help clear this up.

*Michael Kaley  
University of  
Phoenix, Illinois  
Campuses*



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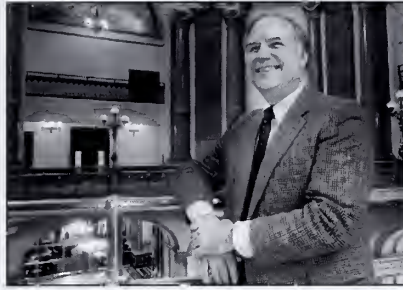
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Charles N. Wheeler III



## When it comes to pay-to-play measure, Blagojevich should accept good enough

by Charles N. Wheeler III

**T**he best is the enemy of the good. Many years ago, a wily legislative veteran shared that venerable wisdom with a rookie reporter, trying to explain why an admittedly flawed piece of legislation still merited passage.

More than three decades of watching state government convinced the cub — now a grizzled columnist — that the old-timer was right.

His insight comes to mind now, listening to Gov. Rod Blagojevich promising to “improve” the most significant campaign finance reform measure ever to clear the Illinois General Assembly.

The legislation — **HB 824** — would strike at the heart of the state’s notorious and longstanding pay-to-play reputation by restricting campaign contributions from major state contractors to the officials who award the contracts. Under its terms, any entity or its affiliates that has or seeks state work worth more than \$50,000 would be barred from fattening the campaign coffers of the state officer awarding the contract or of any candidate for that office.

Major contractors also would have to register with the State Board of Elections, which would place the information on a public searchable database linking contributions and contracts.

The measure cleared the legislature without opposition — 56-0 in the Senate

***The governor’s tinkering could torpedo the measure ... because lawmakers wouldn’t address the issue until after the November election, when they might find voters’ concern about pay-to-play less compelling.***

and 114-0 in the House. But the governor complained that the bill didn’t go far enough. “I think we have an opportunity with that vehicle in my hands to do sweeping things, potentially. I think we can possibly do a whole series of things.”

And that’s where the inherent danger of “perfecting” something that’s merely really, really worthwhile comes in. Sure, the measure says nothing about large contributions to state party organizations, which can pass them on to statewide candidates. It’s silent about legislative leaders whose political committees take in millions of dollars that are passed on to rank-and-file lawmakers, tightening the leaders’ caucus control. It makes no mention of lawmakers voting on issues that pose conflicts of interest.

In short, **HB 824** isn’t the final word on

ethical reform; it’s not even as strong as an earlier version that cleared the House last year only to languish in a Senate committee.

But the bill represents a carefully crafted compromise between reformers and folks who prefer the status quo, a considered judgment of how far down the path to ethical government to push before the effort proves fruitless.

If the governor rewrites the measure, for instance, to hamstring the leaders’ ability to bankroll legislative campaigns, lawmakers would have a choice to accept his changes, override his amendatory veto or see the bill die. The legislative leadership isn’t likely to accept such fetters, so the best hope would be for an override, which even if successful would allow the governor to claim that the bad old lawmakers rejected his more sweeping plan. At worst, the governor’s tinkering could torpedo the measure altogether because lawmakers wouldn’t address the issue until after the November election, when they might find voters’ concern about pay-to-play less compelling.

History shows clearly that voter concern is the key ingredient in moving the General Assembly to enact reform legislation, forcing the political calculation that doing nothing and keeping the status quo carries more risk at the polls than changing the comfortable way of

doing business just enough to mollify the electorate. And progress always is incremental.

When lobbyist registration and disclosure requirements were tightened in 1993, for instance, the reforms — championed by then Secretary of State George Ryan — followed newspaper reports that lobbyists officially reported spending less than \$24,000 in seeking legislative approval for a land-based Chicago casino, while their Las Vegas bosses said they spent more than \$5 million to promote the idea.

While those changes were hailed as the most significant ethics package in years, the law is far from perfect. The Illinois Campaign for Political Reform, for example, has proposed changes that include requiring lobbyists to disclose what they charge for their services and whom they talk to while lobbying. The reform group also wants the law to cover lobbying efforts before boards, agencies, commission boarding authorities and retirement funds.

Similarly, lawmakers approved

campaign finance reform in 1998, including a prohibition on personal use of campaign funds, following newspaper reports of legislators using campaign war chests to buy homes and cars. The package included a ban on gifts to public officials, coming in the wake of federal corruption convictions involving a company's gifts of luxury food and travel to state officials overseeing contract changes favorable to the company.

Again, the legislation was not a cure-all — some of the ethical provisions were tightened five years later. But it — was a compromise that had as one of its greatest virtues unanimous support from legislative leaders.

Sponsors of the current ban on pay-to-play practices acknowledge that the measure is directed at Blagojevich, whose administration is under federal scrutiny for its contracting and hiring practices. Indeed, "all other constitutional officers already have policies against accepting campaign contributions from businesses contracting with their offices," the leaders

of seven reform groups reported in a letter urging the governor to sign the bill.

Just last month, a federal jury found one of the governor's most prolific fundraisers, businessman Tony Rezko, guilty of 16 corruption charges, including money laundering, mail and wire fraud, and bribery.

Trial testimony included an allegation that Blagojevich discussed state contracts, investment banking opportunities and legal work that would be available to campaign contributors.

And media accounts of state contracts, jobs, and appointments going to major donors have become so common they've almost lost their news value.

Forgoing the temptation to "improve" **HB 824** in favor of signing it into law would help counter the widespread suspicion that Illinois government is for sale. As another old proverb counsels, "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." Blagojevich should heed it. □

*Charles N. Wheeler III is director of the Public Affairs Reporting program at the University of Illinois at Springfield.*

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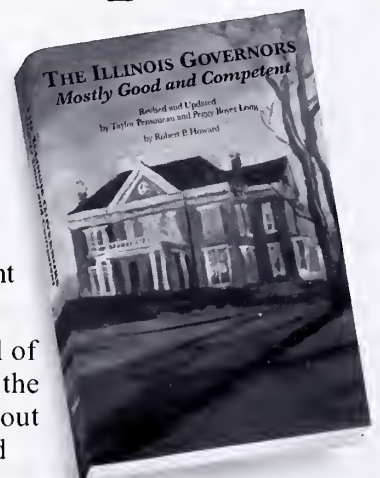
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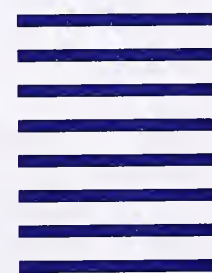
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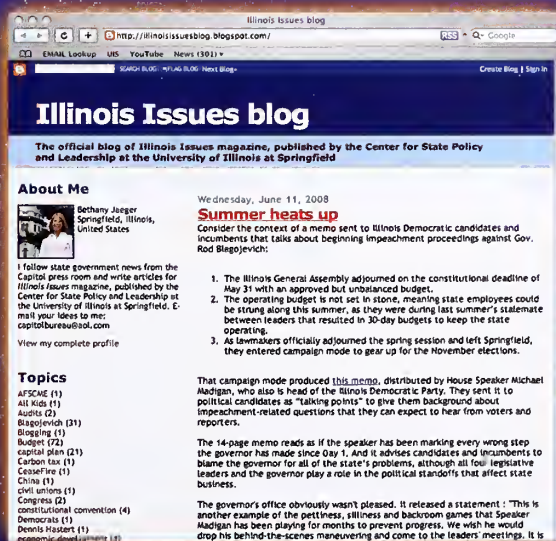
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